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"IN THIS DAY AND AGE, YOU JUST DON'T KNOW": AN EXAMINATION OF HOW PEOPLE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS USE COMMUNICATION TO MANAGE FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY

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by

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Dedication

To Carlos and Bruni.

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“In this Day and Age, You Just Don’t Know”: An Examination of How People in Romantic Relationships Use Communication to Manage Financial Uncertainty

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While finances are known to be a source of uncertainty for couples (Knobloch, 2008), the specific sources of financial ambiguity and the ways in which they are appraised and negotiated have not been explored. Framed by the lens of Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001), the current study used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews of 40 diverse participants in married or cohabiting relationships to provide new insight into uncertainty management. The investigation uncovered the types of uncertainty experienced by participants (economic, personal, family, communication, and chronic), the ways in which people managed uncertainty (reducing, maintaining, and adapting to it through a variety of practical strategies), and barriers to uncertainty management (information, time management, sociocultural, and communication obstacles), shedding light on why people are (not) successful in managing their finances. Consistent with the tenets of UMT (Brashers, 2001), communication (or lack thereof) was critical to the process of uncertainty management, particularly with respect to reducing and maintaining uncertainty. However, this study uniquely found that collective negotiation of financial uncertainty was particularly salient. In many ways, financial uncertainty management can be conceptualized as a joint enterprise. Just as individuals

negotiate uncertainty by seeking information through computer-mediated communication (e.g., the internet), mass media (e.g., magazines), and external interpersonal sources (e.g., financial advisors), this investigation found that people frequently negotiated their uncertainty with their romantic partner through communal coping. This study provides important insight into the ways in which financial uncertainty can influence people's communication, behavior, and relationships and proposes extending the theory to take into account the role that dyads, culture, and individual factors can play in shaping uncertainty management.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

From making purchasing and saving decisions to establishing money management systems and roles, families must negotiate financial issues on a daily basis (Daly, 2003; Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009) in order to meet their basic needs (Poduska, 1992; Voydanoff, 1990) and live fulfilling lives (Poduska, 1992). For example, within a marital or cohabiting relationship, couples must determine how they will (and who will) earn money and manage the family assets, how they will address both mundane and major consumption decisions (such as eating out or buying a home), how they will reconcile potentially differing financial views (e.g., saving versus spending, spending on needs versus wants), and how they will manage economic success and struggles. Unlike some other family issues and concerns, in relationships, interaction about money is unavoidable:

> Money decisions confront families on a regular basis, either through monthly bills arriving or family members' multiple financial needs and requests. Although a couple facing intimacy problems may be able to avoid taking action, such avoidance is less possible when dealing with money matters. External consequences will eventually ensue if money decisions are avoided (Papp et al., 2009, p. 93).

An understanding of financial communication within the family context is important because financial choices influence families' stability and quality of life (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2009). Poor or uninformed financial decisions can result in such negative consequences as bankruptcy, debt, financial crisis (Braunstein & Welch, 2002; Greenspan, 2005), and divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997).

These risks are compounded by the reality that people rarely learn about finances in school (Mandell, 2008) and school-based personal finance management classes may be ineffective (e.g., Mandell & Klein, 2009). Further, in the U.S., talking about money, even to close friends, is generally considered culturally taboo (e.g., Trachtman, 1999; Treas, 1993). In fact, parents are reluctant to disclose financial information to their children (Romo, 2011). This secrecy mindset is often passed down between generations (Elliott, 2012). As a result, couples are left to manage their money largely on their own, with little advice and few models of how to effectively handle their finances (Treas, 1993). Perhaps not surprisingly, just 28% of adults view their financial literacy as very good or better (Godsted & McCormick, 2007), and 40% of adults rate their personal finance knowledge as a C, D, or F (Cunningham, 2012), indicating that most Americans have little confidence that they possess the financial acumen essential for economic stability. Indeed, 56% of adults do not have a budget; 33% do not pay all of their bills on time; 39% carry a monthly credit-card balance; 40% are saving less now than a year ago; and 39% do not have any non-retirement savings (Cunningham, 2012), illustrating the financial management challenges faced by Americans. As Clarke, Heaton, Israelson, and Eggett (2005) maintain, "We are a prosperous nation in great need of financial wisdom" (p. 337).

Americans' "financial illiteracy" (Elliott, 2012, p. 14) is such a concern that many local and national endeavors are underway to provide financial education (cf. Fox, Bartholomae, & Lee, 2005), including efforts by the U.S. government and several nonprofits to spread financial education online. Websites (e.g., mymoney.gov and smartaboutmoney.org) are dedicated to arming people with money management skills and such financial fundamentals as how to balance a checkbook and buy a home. However, when it comes to financial security, Americans generally distrust financial information, not only from the internet, but from banks, financial advisors, family, friends, employers, and the media (Charles Schwab Rethinking Retirement Survey, 2008). These misgivings do not facilitate enhanced financial management.

Financial management struggles are also likely exacerbated by the current state of the U.S. economy. Although the recession officially ended in 2009, high unemployment, lower wages and benefits (Mishel & Shierholz, 2011), perceived job insecurity, housing instability (Gould-Werth & Burgard, 2012), and high student loan, mortgage, credit card, and medical debt (Chiteji & Danziger, 2011) persist. Consider the statistics: presently approximately 8% of U.S. workers are unemployed and 38% of families have had wages, benefits, or hours reduced, 24% have lost their health insurance, and 18% have struggled to pay their mortgage or have experienced foreclosure (Mishel & Shierholz, 2011). More Americans live in poverty now than when the Census Bureau first began tracking these numbers more than 50 years ago (Tavernise, 2011). Over the past year, nearly 77% of Americans have lived paycheck to paycheck and 22% have missed bill payments (Career Builder Harris Interactive Poll, 2010). Additionally, from 2007 to 2009, income dropped by $2,700 for the average working-age household (Mishel & Shierholz, 2011), forcing Americans to change their spending and saving habits (e.g., Shapiro, 2010); indeed 54% have cut back on leisure activities and 21% have reduced their investing and saving (Career Builder Harris Interactive Poll, 2010). More than 30% of Americans reported postponing medical care for themselves or family members in 2012, a 13% increase and the highest rate since Gallup began tracking these numbers in 2001 (Mendes, 2012).

Despite numerous surveys indicating how poorly Americans manage money, as well as documented hardships many have faced as a result of the economic downturn, little is known about family finances from a communication perspective. Although talking about finances and money is a fundamental family communication practice, much of the research pertaining to money and finances within the family system comes from the fields of family and consumer sciences, family studies, psychology, sociology, and economics, exploring such issues as asset management and financial conflict. Financial research that has specifically examined communication processes predominately involves parent-child interaction, identifying the ways in which parents teach and model behaviors to their children via consumer and financial socialization (e.g., Edwards, Allen, & Hayhoe, 2007). Recent literature has begun exploring what motivates parents to disclose financial information to their children (Romo, 2011) as well as children's reports of their financial communication practices with their parents (White, 2011).

To date, however, research exploring marital or cohabiting couples' financial interaction as the primary focus of analysis is lacking. While it is useful to examine parent-child communication, it is also imperative to study how marital and cohabiting partners negotiate communication around finances. As partners are charged with providing for the welfare of themselves and any children they may have, an awareness of how families negotiate financial decisions and monetary concerns could result in a richer understanding of family money management and lend critical insight into how relationships shape and are shaped by financial interaction. It is important to study the role that financial communication plays in these everyday relational processes (Dew, 2008) and how this interaction can affect relationships and shape important behaviors and outcomes (Berger, 2005; Duck, 2008). As Duck (2008) maintains, the future of interpersonal communication involves examining how everyday communication influences relationships.

This manuscript describes a research study designed to explore how couples negotiate finances through the lens of the Theory of Communication and Uncertainty Management, commonly referred to as Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT;

Brashers, 2001). UMT is a practical, applied theory that illuminates how people use communication to manage the uncertainty inherent in life, particularly surrounding contexts that are unpredictable, ambiguous, complex, or lacking information (Brashers, 2001). As finances are known to be a source of uncertainty for spouses (Knobloch, 2008), UMT is a fitting frame for the current investigation.

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature on families and finances, underscoring the need for future study of how finances are negotiated. Next, Chapter 3 describes this study's theoretical grounding, Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001), and introduces the research questions posed in this investigation. Chapter 4 explicates the method used to conduct this research, while Chapter 5 presents the results of the first research question, which explores the types of uncertainty experienced by participants. Chapter 6 describes the results of the second research question, which examines how participants manage uncertainty. Chapter 7 outlines the results of the third research question, focused on identifying participants' barriers to uncertainty management. Last, Chapter 8 concludes with a discussion of the findings, including the study's extension of the theory, practical applications, limitations, and future directions.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The goal of this chapter is to shed light on what is known, and what gaps remain to be filled, about family finances. This chapter will also examine a number of cultural backdrops upon which money is viewed in the U.S.

When it comes to family finances and money, the literature is relatively limited. As Zelizer (1989) writes:

> In terms of data, studying money in the family is entering largely uncharted territory. Although money is the major source of husband-wife disagreements and often a sore point between parents and children, curiously, we know less about money matters than about family violence or even marital sex. Not only are families reluctant to disclose their private financial lives to strangers; husbands, wives, and children often lie, deceive, or simply conceal information from each other as well (p. 352).

Although more than two decades have passed since Zelizer's observation, a paucity of research on family finances and money still exists. This literature falls largely in the realms of parent-child socialization and disclosure, couples' money management, financial conflict, and cultural influences.

PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

An emerging area of family communication involves the study of parent-child interaction about finances. As children primarily learn about finances and money from their parents (e.g., Godsted & McCormick, 2007), exploring the ways in which parents educate their children about money, including what parents reveal or conceal to their children regarding financial matters, is important. These conversations can affect the ways in which children view and communicate about finances as adults (Romo, 2011) and how these children go on to manage money (Clarke et al., 2005; Shim, Barber, Card, Xiao, & Serido, 2010; Webley & Nyhus, 2006). Although not directly related to couples' financial communication, an examination of parent-child communication can help inform how later financial discourse and interactions with romantic partners might be shaped. Parent-child communication has been researched with respect to consumer and financial socialization as well as financial disclosure.

Consumer and Financial Socialization

Despite the importance of financial education, only 6% of high school students are taught about money management, savings, investing, spending, credit, or income in school (Mandell, 2008), and school-based financial management classes may be ineffective (Mandell & Klein, 2009). As a result, children's financial instruction is left primarily in the hands of their parents, who are largely lacking in financial acumen themselves (Godsted & McCormick, 2007) and uncertain about what to tell their children about finances (e.g., Danes, 1994; Romo, 2011). Perhaps this explains why some parents feel more comfortable talking with their children about drugs and alcohol—even sex and dating—than money (ING Direct Harris Interactive Poll, 2008).

Most of the parent-child financial communication literature has examined the ways in which parents use consumer and financial socialization to educate their children about money. Through consumer socialization, parents teach their children to become consumers by talking about brands and pricing and modeling how to make decisions about which products to buy (cf. John, 1999). Family communication patterns (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972) can influence children's purchasing habits, as children with expressive communication styles have more influence over their parents' purchases than children who were taught to avoid conflict (e.g., Caruana & Vassallo, 2003).

Through financial socialization, parents educate their children about such financial concepts as saving, earning, spending, borrowing, and how a credit card works (Danes, 1994; Solheim, Zuiker, & Levchenko, 2011). For example, talking with children about saving and using credit cards while modeling sound financial decisions can make children more aware of and responsible with money (Marshall & Magruder, 1960; Pinto, Parente, & Mansfield, 2005). Additionally, discussing financial matters with children can influence children's future financial behavior (Webley & Nyhus, 2006) and reduce children's economic stress (Serido, Shim, Mishra, & Tang, 2010). College students who feel the most financially prepared reported that their mothers modeled and encouraged them to practice financial literacy (Clarke et al., 2005).

The literature also suggests that parents may socialize their children differently about finances depending on the child's sex. Some research has found that parents socialize their children on "different money tracks" (Newcomb & Rabow, 1999, p. 865), wherein boys are exposed to finances a year earlier than girls, and boys report more knowledge and confidence about finances than girls. College-aged males also report receiving less financial support from their parents than their female peers (Edwards et al., 2007; Newcomb & Rabow, 1999). Further, parents of sons are more likely to talk with their children about money issues than parents of daughters (Bailey & Lown, 1993), and boys perceive they receive more talk about investing and debt than do girls (Romo & Vangelisti, 2011). Girls are socialized to pay more attention to consumer labels than boys (Mangleburg, Grewal, & Bristol, 1997). Children report that fathers model financial tasks more than mothers and that children perceive finances as largely their father's domain (Clarke et al., 2005).

Parent-Child Financial Disclosure

Whereas socialization involves the ways in which parents consciously and subconsciously transmit financial behaviors to their children, parents also communicate information to their children through disclosure of money-related topics. Disclosure is important to examine because it can influence the quality of family relationships and relational satisfaction (Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007), children's psychological well-being (Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000; Lehman & Koerner, 2002), and children's beliefs about sharing personal information (Petronio, 2002).

Family communication scholars have only recently begun examining what financial topics parents and children discuss and why and how privacy rules and orientations are shaped within families (Romo, 2011). Danes (1994) asked parents to indicate which financial issues (ranging from allowance to family net worth) parents think appropriate to share with children and at what age, finding that parents consider certain financial issues, such as family income and debt, off limits to their children regardless of age. Another study found that while nearly all parents believe "it is important to talk to their children about the value of money" (Furnham, 2001, p. 417), parents are uncertain whether to communicate with children about such potentially sensitive financial issues as the family budget or parents' purchasing decisions. Further, while nearly 90% of parents reported disclosing about money matters to their college children, it was unclear exactly what the parents had disclosed and why (Dolgin, 1996).

An additional area of financial disclosure research is mother-daughter disclosure of financial worries and family financial status following a divorce (Koerner et al., 2000; Lehman & Koerner, 2002). Studies have found that the majority of divorced mothers engaged in financial disclosure to their daughters to some extent, in order to prepare them for the future and to socialize them about finances. Mothers who had not disclosed did so to "protect or shield" their daughters from knowledge of financial problems (Koerner et al., 2000, p. 304); indeed, financial disclosure was associated with girls' post-divorce psychological distress (Koerner et al., 2000; Lehman & Koerner, 2002).

Parents' Perceptions of Parent-Child Financial Communication

Extending upon Danes' research (1994), which did not explore parents' motivations for concealing or revealing financial information, Romo (2011) asked parents what topics they had disclosed (or anticipated disclosing) to their children and why. Interpreting the findings through a Communication Privacy Management (CPM; Petronio, 2002) framework, which explores how people negotiate (non) disclosure of private information with others, Romo (2011) found that parents strategically choose whether to reveal financial information to their children. All of the parents reported being open about financial and consumer socialization issues because they deemed this information important for their children to know to become productive members of society. However, many parents were less likely to reveal more taboo topics, such as their own income or debt, unless the parents perceived more benefits from disclosing than concealing. If parents anticipated more risks from the disclosure (e.g., needlessly worrying or shaming their children) than rewards (e.g., preparing children for the future, preventing children from repeating the parents' mistakes), or that talking about money was culturally unacceptable, they did not disclose. However, as much as parents may believe they are safeguarding their children, as Clarke et al. (2005) maintain, not disclosing important financial information to children could prevent them from making wise financial decisions in the future:

> As an increasing number of families struggle with financial solvency, the probability increases that parents will keep financial challenges from children to protect them from a sense of instability, thus producing a possible negative outcome of even fewer financial tasks being taught in the home (p. 338).

Harboring financial secrets could be holding children back. Indeed, in one study, 42% of low- and moderate-income adults reported not learning about finances from their parents growing up; however, for participants who reported that their parents *did* talk with them about money as children, money conversations were positively associated with participants' future financial planning and written goals. This finding suggests that financial communication plays a powerful role in helping people manage their money as adults (Gutter, Kim, & Mauldin, 2012).

Relatedly, Romo (2011) found that although some participants communicated with their children about finances similarly to the ways in which their own parents talked (or did not talk) about money with them when they were growing up, other parents deliberately socialized their children about money differently than they had been raised. These parents perceived the way they had been socialized as a barrier to their future financial well-being and were generally more candid with their own children (e.g., openly disclosing about money because their parents had kept financial information secret from them growing up). In this way, parents' privacy orientations (Petronio, 2002), or the set of values families pass down over generations, influenced participants' financial openness or closedness with their own children. Participants either taught their children about finances in the manner in which they had learned or broke away from their upbringing, altering their original privacy orientation (Romo, 2011).

Children's Perceptions of Parent-Child Financial Communication

Limited research has begun exploring parent-child financial communication from a child's perspective. Romo and Vangelisti (2011) interviewed 135 children ages 8-17 (average age was 10.5) about the financial information they perceived their parents did and did not discuss with them. Consistent with parent reports (Romo, 2011), children recounted that their parents talked most about such consumer and financial socialization topics as saving, spending, and earning. Children perceived their parents shared financial information when it was important for the children to know (e.g., for their future well-being), consistent with the notion that parents discuss finances when such information is more beneficial than costly for the parent and/or child (Romo, 2011). Children were also cognizant that parents kept certain financial information (e.g., taboo topics such as parent income) off limits. While many children were unsure why their parents concealed, several speculated that their parents did not disclose because they did not want the children to worry or share the information with others (also consistent with prior research and the risk-benefit criteria of CPM; Petronio, 2002; Romo, 2011).

In addition, a study of 205 college students (with an average age of 19.3) uncovered that parents are not the only family members who avoid talking about finances or deliberately conceal financial information. White (2011) found that children also avoided talking about money and purchases, particularly with their fathers, in order to protect the children's privacy, prevent conflict, and safeguard the parent-child relationship. Some children deliberately concealed purchases from their parents, in part because they perceived their parents would not approve of or would be upset by these expenditures.

Parent-child financial communication, via socialization and disclosure, likely shapes couples' communication about money in several ways. When they are grown, children are often confronted with the same financial problems as their parents (McCormick, 2009). If children do not receive valuable financial information from their parents, if children perceive their parents' financial disclosure to be stressful (e.g., Koerner et al., 2000; Lehman & Koerner, 2002), or if children grow up avoiding talking about finances with their parents or concealing purchases from them (White, 2011), children might avoid talking about finances with their romantic partner later in life, their conversations about finances could be strained, or they could make unwise financial decisions as adults. Additionally, if parents communicate differently about finances with boys and girls, children may grow up with dissimilar perspectives and acumen about money, depending on their sex. Differing financial socialization could explain why research finds that men rate financial success as more important and believe they will have a better chance of being financially successful than do women (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), women are less confident in financial decision making (Powell & Ansic, 1997; Stinerock, Stern, & Soloman, 1991), less knowledgeable about investing (Chen & Volk, 1998; Volpe, Chen, & Pavlicko, 1996), and more conservative in their financial management (Furnham, 1984). These beliefs could influence the financial roles men and women play and their financial attitudes and behaviors in future romantic relationships. Further, if children are unhappy with their parents' privacy orientations regarding money, they may construct a different set of values when communicating with their spouse (e.g., Romo, 2011).

COUPLES' MONEY MANAGEMENT

As marriage inherently involves decisions about the merging of resources (Treas, 1993), much of the research on family finances has examined how couples manage household income and assets in the so-called "domestic economy" (Pahl, 2000). Couples operate within systems of privatized (in which individual assets are kept separate and managed independently) or collectivized (money is pooled) money management (Treas, 1993). It is most common for married couples to pool all of their money (Lauer & Yodanis, 2011). Within these collectivized arrangements, couples choose whether to engage in the practices of joint sharing (in which partners both have access to all accounts and can freely withdraw money), whole wage (in which one partner turns over his or her income, minus spending money, to the other spouse to manage fully), or housekeeping allowance (in which one spouse controls the finances but provides the other spouse with an allowance to pay for household expenses; Pahl, 1995). Some couples pool some of their money but also retain individual accounts (Treas, 1993).

Scholars have examined the equity, power, and gender issues latent within these money management decisions. Complete joint management is more likely to occur in higher-income families and less likely in relationships with previously-divorced or widowed individuals and in cases in which both partners are working (Treas, 1993). If only husbands are employed, they tend to control the family finances but delegate part of the day-to-day management to their wives (Pahl, 1995). When husbands solely manage the family's money, they have more control over finances and emerge as the more dominant partner, putting their wives at a disadvantage (Pahl, 1995).

Although wives who are their family's primary breadwinners (nearly 40% and rising; Mundy, 2012) are more likely to manage the family's money (Bernasek & Bajtelsmit, 2002; Treas, 1993), women still remain under-benefitted because, compared with male money managers, women are less likely to spend money on themselves and women's money management is often viewed as a gendered household task. Husbands' solo management, on the other hand, reflects male relational power (Pahl, 1990). Even when wives earn double the salary and work in higher status occupations than their husbands, these women are reluctant to completely control decision making or identify themselves as providers out of a need to maintain the male-as-breadwinner-status quo—the wives do not want to appear more powerful or superior to their spouses. After all, both men and women view money as a source of male identity, power, and self-esteem (Prince, 1993). In this way, even non-breadwinning husbands can retain power at the expense of their wives (Tichenor, 1999).

Couples generally perceive shared management arrangements to be more equal and privatized management to be less equitable (Kurdek, 1991; Schaninger & Buss, 1986). With respect to privatized management, “there is a tendency to develop a ‘yours, mine, and ours’ attitude toward the distribution of income which can cause emotional distance” (Poduska, 1992, p. 766). Indeed, separate accounts have been associated with lowered expectations of marital success (Treas, 1993). Conversely, couples who share financial decision-making are more satisfied than those who do not, and happily-married couples report more wife influence and less husband dominance in family finances (Kurdek, 1991; Schaninger & Buss, 1986).

Largely missing from the extant financial management literature is an examination of how couples actually handle and make decisions about the merging of resources. A notable exception is a longitudinal qualitative study in which couples were interviewed before their marriage and a year later (Burgoyne, Reibstein, Edmunds, & Dolman, 2006). While most couples maintained separate accounts before they married, a year later some were pooling their money. The authors found that the couples’ financial arrangements were influenced by pragmatic motives, such as the need to combine funds in order to afford expensive purchases, as well as ideological reasons, such as a desire for financial autonomy or valuing sharing and connection within a marriage. Additional knowledge of couples’ financial decision-making processes is needed to build upon these findings so that family roles can better be understood and effective ways in which couples handle their finances can be identified.

FINANCIAL CONFLICT

Another major area of family financial research involves the examination of financial conflict. Financial conflict is “one of the most important problems in contemporary married life” (Dew, 2009, p. 27). Conflict is inherent in romantic relationships (e.g., Beach, 2001; Fincham, 2003) and can be defined as “social interactions in which the spouses hold incompatible goals” (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001, p. 76). Although conflict is a communicative behavior and one of the most studied family communication phenomena (cf. Sillars, Canary, & Tafoya, 2004), communication scholars have not specifically addressed financial conflict and how it is negotiated in relationships. Other fields have examined financial conflict as manifested by financial disagreements and mediated by family economic stress.

Financial Disagreements

Finances are consistently ranked high among participants’ reports of spousal conflict (Erbert, 2000; Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). Indeed, couples in romantic relationships report money as one of their top sources of arguments (Papp et al., 2009; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). For example, a study of 908 heterosexual, never-divorced participants who were either engaged or married for 1-8 years or 9-25 years listed money as the number one problem-starter in their relationships overall, far surpassing such other issues as career, children, chores, communication, and in-laws. For participants who had been married 26 years or more, money was second to no problems reported. Among previously-divorced participants, money problems were second to either children or no problems across all relational status categories (Stanley et al., 2002). Similarly, a longitudinal investigation of couples before marriage, during their early marriage, and during their early parenting days found that money was their top problem area (surpassing such other problems as sex, communication, and relatives) across these periods (Storaasli & Markman, 1990). A recent national survey confirms that financial matters are the most common source of discord among married or cohabitating couples; finances trigger an average of three arguments per month. Couples fight most about differing ideas of "needs" versus "wants" (identified by 58% of participants), unexpected expenses (49%), and lack of savings (32%; American Institute of CPAs Harris Interactive Survey, 2012).

Money quarrels can result in numerous adverse family outcomes. For instance, financial conflict can negatively affect marital satisfaction (Kerkmann, Lee, Lown, & Allgood, 2000). Further, arguments about money are associated with increases in fighting and less quality time spent together. This lack of quality time, in turn, has been linked to marital instability (Gudmunson, Beutler, Israelson, McCoy, & Hill, 2007). In a 12-year-longitudinal investigation of married couples, Amato and Rogers (1997) found that "spending money foolishly" was a salient predictor of divorce, third only to extramarital affairs and drug/alcohol abuse. Couples who argue about money once a week are 30% more likely to divorce than couples who argue about finances a few times a month (Dew, 2009), suggesting that the frequency of money-related arguments is linked to marital dissolution. Additionally, for both husbands and wives, arguments over money (versus arguments over other issues, such as sex) are the biggest predictors of divorce (Dew, 2009). Aside from relational dissolution, couples who report fighting about money have higher levels of negative communication and conflict than couples who argue about other topics (Stanley et al., 2002).

Several characteristics are associated with the likelihood of financial fights. For instance, couples with credit card debt are more likely to argue over money, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Dew, 2009). Further, “highly materialistic” couples of all income levels report more perceptions of financial problems, which in turn lead to decreased marital satisfaction (Dean, Carroll, & Yang, 2007). Additionally, while couples in which one spouse is a “tightwad” and the other is a “spendthrift” are inclined to marry, these divergent spending styles tend to predict conflict, which in turn predicts declines in marital well-being (Rick, Small, & Finkel, 2011). Remarried couples with children experience particular financial challenges and uncertainty, which can cause stress on their marriage. These challenges include an inability to predict the amount of monthly child support payments and cost of children’s medical and educational expenses, as well as the degree to which the stepparent will provide for the children (Lown & Dolan, 1988).

Family Economic Stress

Conflict can arise not just from conflicting interpersonal goals surrounding money, but from environmental factors, such as a shortage of financial resources (Bradbury et al., 2001; Fincham, 2003) and uncertainty surrounding the management of finances. Indeed, part of the reason financial topics can lead to disagreements is because negotiating family financial decisions (especially when there is a lack of funds) can be stressful and financial problems may be difficult to resolve. An inability to develop viable ways to address money problems can result in arguments about finances (Conger, Ge, & Lorenz, 1994). Research detailing the experiences of rural Midwestern families during a period of economic uncertainty in the 1980s connected economic adversity with negative relational outcomes, finding that economic hardship increased strain on both members of the couple. This strain was associated with romantic partners expressing more hostility toward each other and fewer warm and supportive interactions. These interactions, in turn, reduced marital quality and stability (Conger et al., 1990).

Building upon their earlier research, Conger and Elder (1994a) developed the family stress model to explain the influence economic hardship and financial anxiety can have on families. The framework proposes that "stressful events or conditions create strains or pressures in daily living" which affect behaviors and moods, which in turn influence well-being (p. 9). In this way, Conger and his associates linked economic hardship (e.g., low family income, unstable work, income loss, high debt) with specific negative outcomes. As Conger, Ge, and Lorenz (1994) maintain, after investigating more than 400 Iowa families' experiences with the Great Farm Crisis of the 1980s, "mounting economic pressures generally bring budgetary matters to the fore, enhancing preoccupation with financial issues that, in many families, generate frustration, anger, and general demoralization" (p. 189).

The family stress model posits that financial stress does not only affect parents, but children as well (cf. Barnett, 2008). Consistent with the interdependent nature of the family system (Kelley, 1983), economic pressure increases both spousal and parent-child financial conflict and depression. These outcomes are in turn associated with hostility throughout the family, increasing teens' risk of emotional and behavioral problems (e.g., Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1992; Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1993; Conger & Elder, 1994a; 1994b; Skinner, Elder, & Conger, 1992).

While the family stress model originally examined the experiences of economically-struggling rural families with male breadwinners, it has since been extended to urban and female populations. For example, a longitudinal analysis of 815 unemployed urban workers of both sexes and their spouses revealed that financial strain from job loss and unemployment increased depression for both partners, which decreased the non-unemployed partners' ability to provide social support and heightened their use of such negative behaviors as criticism and insults. In turn, job seekers became more depressed and couples' marital satisfaction declined (Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996).

A lack of financial resources can also prevent cohabiting couples from entering into marriage. Interviews of 115 lower-income participants revealed that financial insecurity served not only as a source of conflict and relational dissatisfaction but a deterrent to marriage, as participants were reluctant to marry without economic stability (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Conversely, supporting the tenets of the family stress model, stable finances have been linked to marital satisfaction (Wong & Goodwin, 2009), and assets have been found to minimize conflict (Dew, 2009).

Most recently, the family stress model has been tested with respect to families experiencing what has been deemed subjective (as opposed to objective) economic hardship (Papp et al., 2009). In other words, couples perceived they were struggling when they were generally not experiencing acute economic hardship. An analysis of non-financially struggling husbands' and wives' diary reports of conflict over a 15-day-period revealed that while money (which included spending, wages, salary, and bills) was not the biggest source of conflict for couples (wives rated it fifth and husbands rated it sixth), compared with other sources of contention, money conflict was more salient. Specifically, compared to arguments about other issues, arguments related to finances were longer in length, less likely to be resolved, reoccurring, more relevant to partners' relationships, and more likely to be mishandled. During money conflicts, husbands expressed more anger, hostility, threat, and defensiveness, and both husbands and wives reported more depressive behavior, including withdrawal, sadness, and fear (Papp et al., 2009). This study revealed that money-induced stress and its accompanying negative outcomes can occur even among families who are not struggling financially, particularly if partners disagree on how finances should be managed, who should control the money, and/or if spouses wrongly perceive that they are unable to afford certain items. Simply put, couples of all economic backgrounds can be adversely affected by financial challenges (Dew, 2009).

Positive Outcomes

Despite the negative consequences that can result from financial disagreements and stress, not all couples facing economic struggles or strain are destined for relational dissatisfaction or irreconcilable, relationship-terminating conflict. Negotiating economic hardship necessitates coping with financial pressure (Conger & Elder, 1994a, 1994b), for example, by engaging in prosocial communication and social support, which can possibly mitigate the negative outcomes of financial stress and help families facing economic hardship become resilient (e.g., Voydanoff, 1990). The risk of economic pressure turning in to economic stress can be reduced by high marital support and effective problem solving (Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger, Reuter, & Elder, 1999). Low-income families who reported strong communication (e.g., they could openly express their feelings and talk through decisions); problem solving (e.g., the belief they could work through problems); and social support (they could turn to friends for help) predicted positive outcomes (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004). Additionally, low-income mothers who sought social and instrumental support from friends were better able to cope with the challenges of making ends meet (Mistry, Lowe, Benner, & Chien, 2008).

Compared to chronic poverty, periods of relatively sudden economic insecurity, such as the economic downturn of the 1980s or the Great Depression of the 1930s, are sources of unanticipated uncertainty, as families are forced to manage the unexpected losses of income or jobs (Liker & Elder, 1983). Communication likely plays a key role in negotiating these tumultuous and unpredictable economic times. Voydanoff (1990) reviewed research on economic distress (potential economic stressors such as employment instability, employment uncertainty, economic deprivation, and economic strain), finding that while economic distress can have adverse effects on individuals and relationships, strategies such as social support, personal and family coping, and changing spending habits can assist families in managing difficult economic times. Additionally, strong affective and instrumental communication can help families become resilient, as such communication enables them to accomplish goals (Landau, 2007). Elder, Robertson, and Ardelt (1994) identified several strategies that help families cope with stress, including reducing expenditures; borrowing money; postponing purchases, bill paying, and medical care; and working more hours or entering other family members into the labor market. When families were able to make adjustments and regain some semblance of control, depressive symptoms dissipated (Elder et al., 1994).

Recently, the U.S. experienced a recession second only to the Great Depression in its severity (Gould-Werth & Burgard, 2012). In fact, Papp et al. (2009) note as a limitation of their study on subjective hardship that couples might talk more often and more negatively about finances following the recession than when their data were collected in 1999-2000. However, this negativity may not be the case. Despite the spousal tensions that often accompany economic downturns, the divorce rate generally declines during such periods of uncertainty. This may be because couples cannot afford to separate (e.g., Roberts, 2009) or because couples learn to depend on one another during times of hardship. As Wilcox and Marquardt (2009) maintain, in order to cope with the recession, "millions of Americans have adopted a home-grown bail out strategy. They are relying upon their own marriages and families to weather this economic storm" (p. 16).

While the recession and its accompanying "job losses, foreclosures, household debt, bill collectors' incessant calls, and dramatic declines in retirement savings" increased marital tension for many couples, others relied on their marriages as "an economic partnership and social safety net," turning to their spouse as a source of economic and social support during tumultuous times (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2009, p. 16). An understanding of the specific spousal communication processes that enable couples to adapt to economic adversity will help shed light on the resiliency of marriage.

Similarly, research on economic hardship during the Great Depression indicates that for many, "financial issues quickly become a focal point of antagonism and conflict. Hard times turn into bad times as the marriage disintegrates in rounds of name calling and physical violence"; however, some families were able to successfully cope through "effective adaptations, particularly when they encounter economic misfortune with strong family bonds" (Liker & Elder, 1983, p. 343). For many couples, especially those whose marital bond was weaker prior to economic adversity, who were unable to effectively adapt to financial stressors, and who were wealthier and unaccustomed to coping with economic instability, the Great Depression increased conflict and decreased relational satisfaction. However, couples who had strong bonds before the Great Depression, effective coping skills, and who had successfully adapted to prior economic challenges, were less adversely affected, as their experience with hardship served as a "protective resource" (Liker & Elder, 1983). Consequently, lower-income couples were "undoubtedly less apt to feel traumatized by a lack of financial resources and security" than their higher-income peers (Liker & Elder, 1983, p. 356). Families' previous experiences successfully managing demands can build their resiliency, enabling them to effectively negotiate future adversity (Landau, 2007). Individuals who are not exposed to stressful events fail to learn basic coping skills, likely making them more vulnerable during periods of hardship (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Thus, it is false to assume that couples are destined for negative marital outcomes due to economic stress or a lower socioeconomic status (Gottman, 1994; Liker & Elder, 1983); in fact, in some cases, blue-collar families are better able to cope with financial adversity than white-collar workers (Krokoff, Gottman, & Roy, 1988). As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain, "…The paradox of life satisfaction research is that there is little relation between living under objectively favorable or unfavorable conditions and satisfaction" (p. 201). Research regarding communication about finances should accommodate the possibility of these varied outcomes and processes and explore how families manage their finances in order to "emerge from the 'dark valley' of uncontrollable circumstances" that accompany periods of economic hardship (Elder et al., Ardelt, 1994, p. 93), as well as everyday financial challenges. Such an understanding involves learning how couples negotiate the uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability surrounding economic hardship and daily financial management.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

In addition to research on family finances, scholars have explored the cultural backdrop of money and finances in the U.S. As Wuthnow (1996) notes, "money is a product of culture" (p. 139). As such, American culture likely affects how couples think and talk about money and finances. Culture may influence couples' negotiation about money with respect to such discourse as the money taboo, Protestant Work Ethic, spending on needs versus wants, being candid versus secretive about money matters with one's partner, and people's love-hate relationship with money.

Money Taboo

The paucity of academic research on family finances may be due to the fact that in the U.S., a taboo about talking about money exists (e.g., Trachtman, 1999). As Krueger (1991) writes, "Money may be society's last emotional taboo" (p. 209). To this end, people are generally socialized that it is inappropriate to talk about how much money they have or make, even to close friends or family. Money "…doesn't lend itself to conversation…Even the most intimate of social networks seems not to penetrate the privacy of marital finances" (Treas, 1993, p. 727). Drawing on his research conducting a national survey of approximately 2,000 workers, administering 200 in-depth qualitative interviews from a diverse group of participants across the country, and analyzing scholarly literature and studies, Wuthnow (1996) concluded that, "Money is perhaps the topic that remains most subject to deep norms of stricture and taboo" (p. 140). People are particularly hesitant to talk about salaries, net worth, and debt with one another, as there is a "boundary separating money from human relationships" (Wuthnow, 1996, p. 191). Indeed, many of the parents Romo (2011) interviewed acknowledged a money taboo that prevented them from openly discussing finances with their children. As one participant explained, "Socially you don't ask people those kinds of things; you just don't ask people how much money you make, how much credit card debt do you have. People just don't talk about those things" (p. 273). Another participant reported that she did not talk specifics about debt or savings or salary with anyone and did not plan to with her son:

> I might [someday] explain to him me going into debt and what that was like and the percentages and how bad it really screwed me in the end . . . but I don't think I'll tell him, "I'm X amount of dollars in debt," and I don't see myself ever discussing my salary with him either. I don't know why; I don't discuss that with anybody. Not my parents, my friends, nobody knows . . . (p. 273).

Because of this money taboo, people are likely to be anxious about finances as there areno "agreed upon, objective standards for thinking about money" (Wuthnow, 1996, p. 152) and people are never certain whether they have enough or are properly managing their finances (Wuthnow, 1996). This money taboo, coupled with the lack of formal financial education in the U.S. (e.g., Mandell, 2008) and an uncertain post-recession economic climate (e.g., Baker, Bloom & Davis, 2012), is likely to contribute to general confusion about money and poor financial practices and outcomes (e.g., Braunstein & Welch, 2002; Elliott, 2012; Greenspan, 2005).

Protestant Work Ethic

Although money talk, particularly about personal financial information, is generally off limits in the U.S., the quest for financial success, as reflected by the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE; Weber, 1958), is a dominant yet implicit foundation of America's capitalist society. The PWE posits that it is through a strong work ethic and prudent spending and saving that people can become successful. The PWE is an "orientation towards work which emphasizes dedication to hard work, deferment of immediate rewards, conservations of resources, the saving of surplus wealth, and the avoidance of idleness and waste in any form" (Beit-Hallahmi, 1979, p. 263). The Protestant Work Ethic is very much in line with the American Dream, the promise that in the U.S., through hard work and self-reliance, everyone has the opportunity to achieve financial success and happiness. The U.S. was constructed on the principle that it is possible not only to live a prosperous life, but an even better life through upward advancement, and parents yearn to provide their children with more opportunities than they had growing up (Schor, 1998). Americans believe they can control their own destinies and that through hard work people can be successful; indeed, "belief in the desirability of certain goals and in their obtainability through specific acts is seen as the natural view of life in this industrialized, consumer-oriented society" (Mishel, 1990, p. 257). However, a belief in the PWE and the possibility of control bumps up against the reality that people cannot control everything (see, e.g., Brashers, 2001), especially macro-level economic events such as a recession. Thus, despite their hopes and best intentions, individuals may be limited in their ability to financially get ahead.

Additionally, some research indicates that there is a "dark side" to the American Dream (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). While higher levels of income are associated with greater happiness, (e.g., Aknin, Norton & Dunn, 2009), income only increases well-being to the extent that it helps people meet their basic needs (cf. Ahuvia, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). People regularly overestimate the relationship between money and happiness, believing that higher-income people are happier and lower-income people are less happy than they actually are (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Indeed, how individuals perceive their financial situation and the control they have over life mediates the association between income and life satisfaction (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). In other words, it is not amount of income but appraisals about finances that matter: "The economic environment important to life satisfaction may consist of psychological perceptions of financial matters rather than the actual financial matters themselves" (Johnson & Krueger, 2006, p. 680). Additionally, despite the cultural importance of achieving wealth and prosperity, a high aspiration for financial success has been negatively associated with well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

Spending on Needs versus Wants

Despite a cultural focus on hard work and saving, and the best intentions of financial planners, Americans predominately overspend and under-save (Schor, 1998).

While some economists argue that people's consumption habits can be understood via a cognitive perspective focused on will power and self-control, Starr (2004) argues that Americans' spending and saving habits are rooted in "learning, living, and interacting in a sociocultural setting in which material acquisitions and satisfactions are prioritized" (p. 216). In fact, the tension between spending on "needs" versus "wants" has emerged as the top source of couples' financial conflict (American Institute of CPAs Harris Interactive survey, 2012). Indeed, even the mainstream media propagate this mindset (Starr, 2004). In order to sell products, for instance, advertisements often proclaim that people are "worth it" or deserve to buy a particular discretionary item (Schor, 1998). Americans of all income levels yearn to fit in, engaging in similar consumption practices in hopes of connecting with others (Pugh, 2009) and establishing a particular identity (Ahuvia, 2008). For low-income people in particular, the desire to achieve social status by acquiring goods is particularly strong in order to avoid feeling deprived or standing out (Schor, 1998). At the same time, however, studies show that highly valuing material goods makes people less happy (Ahuvia, 2008; Aknin, Norton & Dunn, 2009).

In the U.S., this conflict between materialism and restraint (Wuthnow, 1996) at least partly stems from a mentality of "keeping up with the Joneses" (Duesenberry, 1949), which reflects a notion that because status is reflected by spending, people try to maintain the same social position as others—even those wealthier than they—by buying similar goods and services, even if they cannot afford them. Participation in such "competitive consumption" often decreases family's finances and savings (Schor, 1998) and leads to dissatisfaction, as couples are focused on what money can buy rather than on the health of their relationship (Poduska, 1992). Related to negotiating whether to spend on needs or wants is a tension between planning for the future or living in the moment (Samsi & Manthorpe, 2011). Considered in the context of finances, this tension is reflected by a conflicting desire to live for today (e.g., spend money and enjoy life in the present since the future is uncertain) versus save for a "rainy day" (Canova, Rattazzi, & Webley, 2005) and maintain a reserve of money for unforeseen, costly events, such as bills or repairs. To reconcile this dilemma, financial experts suggest viewing saving and spending not as opposites, but as intrinsically related, conceptualizing saving as merely postponed spending (Stevens, 2012).

In the current post-recession era, frugality has become more respected, even "cool," with Americans cutting back on buying such luxuries as red meat, plastic surgery, cars, and entertainment (Harris, 2009). Indeed, 54% of Americans reduced leisure activities following the recession (Career Builder Harris Interactive Poll, 2010), suggesting that people's habits are shifting to spend more on needs and less on wants.

Being Candid Versus Secretive About Money Matters with One's Partner

As opposed to avoiding talking about money because such conversations are viewed as culturally off limits, couples also face a tension between being open or closed about their financial dealings with respect to hiding financial information (e.g., concealing purchases) from one another. So-called "financial infidelity" involves being dishonest about spending and saving with one's partner. In fact, 31% of partners who pool their money admit to lying about money to their significant other. Of these partners, 67% said their financial infidelity caused an argument, 42% said it reduced trust in their relationship, 11% said it led to a separation, and 16% said it resulted in divorce. Fifty-eight percent of these financially-unfaithful significant others concealed cash; 54% concealed a minor purchase; 30% concealed a bill; 16% concealed a major purchase; 15% concealed a bank account; 11% lied about debt; and 11% lied about earnings (Goudreau, 2011).

It is possible that spousal deceivers feel entitled to manage money in the manner they desire without having to answer to their partner, reflecting a tension between independence and interdependence in romantic relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Spouses may also conceal this information because they do not feel comfortable talking about money, they do not think their partner will condone their actions (thus, disclosing is too risky; Petronio, 2002), they are looking to gain control in an insecure relationship or revenge after being betrayed, or they are looking to fill a void or seek a thrill (Elejalde-Ruiz, 2011).

Love-Hate Relationship with Money

In part due to social norms as well as contextual and environmental factors, people hold contrasting beliefs and values about money (e.g., Mitchell & Mickel, 1999; Prince, 1993), a so-called "internal contradiction" regarding finances (Wuthnow, 1996, p. 168). Americans are ambivalent about money (Wuthnow, 1996): some view it as important and the key to success, whereas others consider it a barrier to happiness or the root of all evil. Money is instrumental (required to live) as well as symbolic (e.g., of power, prestige, achievement, freedom, oppression), a source of worry as well as a source of pride, and involves decisions about saving as well as spending (Mitchell & Mickel, 1999). Americans also find themselves having to "…cope with the mixed messages and divergent pressures that arise in a society that simultaneously places considerable emphasis on both material values and more collective-oriented values such as family cohesion, community ties, and religious fulfillment" (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002, p. 348). Indeed, these conflicting values create tension, which has been linked to declines in well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

As Krueger (1986) writes, “Money is probably the most emotionally meaningful object in contemporary life: only food and sex are its close competitors as common carriers of such strong and diverse feelings, significance, and strivings” (p. 3). These financial contradictions are likely manifested in people’s identities and in their relationships.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

While money and finances are culturally and interpersonally salient, communication research on how families negotiate communication about finances is scarce. Interdisciplinary research has uncovered that how couples handle finances, particularly financial stresses, can affect the entire family (Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1992; Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1993; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simmons, 1994); yet romantic partners’ financial communication has not been systematically explored from a communication perspective. Limited family financial communication literature has examined parent-child communication and scant research has focused on what couples’ financial conversations and arguments look like, how couples resolve (or do not resolve) conflict, the extent to which partners socialize each other about money, and what financial topics couples do and do not disclose to one another and what motivates these (non) disclosures. It is also unclear how couples’ communication is affected by larger social forces (Duck, 2008), such as the economy and broader culture, particularly when the culture emits contradictory messages and norms. Examining the ways in which couples’ socioeconomic status and culture are reflected by partners’ interaction and financial practices could yield valuable insights into how communication is affected by these understudied factors (Duck, 2008). After all, “anthropologists have long recognized that a key to understanding cultural systems is to focus on those things that are considered taboo" (Wuthnow, 1996, p. 140).

As family financial communication begins with couples' money management and decisions and directly affects the rest of the household, it is imperative to study the ways in which romantic partners manage financial communication. From everyday decisions such as deciding which brands of groceries to purchase, to major choices about whether to foreclose on a home, couples of all socioeconomic statuses are constantly faced with financial decisions and cultural tensions that can affect their economic and relational outcomes. What unites financial research across disciplines is a sense that Americans receive little, if any, training on financial management and are largely left to make financial choices on their own, navigating their families through both stable and unpredictable economic times and managing financial stressors.

In the wake of the recent economic downturn, economic uncertainty is roughly double that of the previous 23 years (Baker, Bloom, & Davis, 2012). In fact, 90% of Americans worry about finances; saving enough for retirement is the top concern (American Institute of CPA's Harris Interactive Survey, 2011). As Americans harbor financial fears for themselves and their children (Eisenbrey, Mishell, Bivens, & Fieldhouse, 2011), today's tumultuous economic times particularly underscore the need to understand how families of all income levels communicate about and manage their finances.

As finances are reported to be a source of uncertainty within marriages (Knobloch, 2008), the goal of the current manuscript is to shed light on the taboo and understudied subject of finances by examining how couples use communication to negotiate this uncertainty. The Theory of Communication and Uncertainty Management, commonly referred to as Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001), which is grounded on the premise that people use communication to manage ambiguity, is a particularly appropriate framework given the uncertainty surrounding money matters.

Chapter Three: Review of Uncertainty Management Theory

The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001), the framework that will be used in the current investigation to explore the communication involved in managing finances. UMT is a particularly appropriate lens in which to study financial management because making financial decisions and negotiating finances exemplifies the "…complexity that characterizes everyday life" (Brashers, 2001, p. 477). Before describing UMT, it is important to define uncertainty and detail the theory's influences.

UNCERTAINTY DEFINED

A fundamental part of life (e.g., Cohen, 1993; Goldsmith, 2001; Selder, 1989), uncertainty has emerged as a foundational area of communication research (Babrow, 2001). Uncertainty is a psychological state (Babrow, Kasch, & Ford, 1998) that can be defined as a reaction to situations or behaviors that are unpredictable, ambiguous, probabilistic, and complex. People also experience uncertainty when they lack confidence in their knowledge of certain matters (Brashers, 2001), are unclear of the best choice or action (Shaha, Cox, Talman, & Kelly, 2008), are unsure of the likelihood of an occurrence (Fox & Irwin, 1998), or lack sufficient or consistent information (Brashers, 2001). As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain, "uncertainty can come from conflicting values, commitment or goals, or not knowing what to do" (p. 107). Just about anything can be a source of uncertainty (Knobloch & Soloman, 2002). As Cohen (1993) explains:

> Uncertainty varies in degree of magnitude, intensity, and saliency—from the overarching, existential issues of life and death to the inconsequential contingencies and probabilities that are the substance of everyday life. The source of uncertainty may be internal, as individuals question their beliefs, values and

> self-worth, or may arise from conditions that are perceived as novel, ambiguous, or lacking information. Uncertainty may be time-limited or persist indefinitely, affecting either critical or non-critical areas of one's life and having either serious or minimal long-range consequences. It may be an overwhelming source of stress or a welcome challenge that provides an antidote to boredom. The experience of uncertainty may be socially shared or biographically unique (p. 78).

UMT involves identifying the various sources of uncertainty with which people are faced and examining how people experience this uncertainty. The theory focuses on how people manage this uncertainty communicatively, including negotiating the dilemmas and challenges involved with uncertainty-management strategies (Hogan & Brashers, 2009). UMT has been heavily influenced by several theories and frameworks, including Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and the model of uncertainty in illness (Mishel, 1988, 1990), with its application of the theory of stress, appraisal, and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

Influenced by information and attribution theories, the communication-based study of uncertainty formally began with Berger and Calabrese's (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). Originally applied to initial interactions in interpersonal relationships, URT posits that uncertainty is an aversive, highly undesirable state. People are motivated to reduce uncertainty to gain control and increase understanding and prediction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). URT is centered on the premise that "uncertainty is viewed as the enemy that must be eliminated" (Mishel, 1990, p. 261). Consequentially, URT posits that when uncertainty is high, people strive to reduce it through information seeking (e.g., by such communication as asking questions; Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

For several years after the development of the theory, uncertainty was considered an undesirable, "monolithic experience" (Babrow & Kline, 2000, p. 1810) that could be reduced by acquiring information. However, researchers began extending and revising URT, finding, for example, that uncertainty is more nuanced than previously thought. In some cases, communication was revealed to actually increase uncertainty, e.g., if new information calls existing knowledge into question (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Kellerman and Reynolds (1990) found that people do not automatically want to reduce uncertainty, but rather choose to seek information when they have a low tolerance for uncertainty. For people with a higher uncertainty threshold, sometimes "ignorance is bliss" (p. 5). Additionally, Kramer (1999) found that people have to be motivated to reduce their uncertainty, and that uncertainty reduction is not always positive, but can result in negative outcomes. Uncertainty can also be reduced not only by information seeking, but cognitively, via stereotyping or attribution making (Kramer, 1999). Further, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) disputed the notion that people always seek to reduce uncertainty, theorizing that uncertainty can be positive when it is perceived as creating thrill and excitement, and that people must manage the dialectical tension between a desire for certainty and unpredictability in their relationships. Over the years, URT has been tested and expanded beyond its original realm of communication with strangers to communication involved in intercultural interactions (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001), organizational settings (e.g., Kramer; 1999), and communication in established relationships (cf. Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009).

With respect to uncertainty in established romantic relationships, scholars have examined the issues about which dating and married partners are unsure, stemming from self uncertainty (i.e., questions about one's own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors pertaining to the relationship); partner uncertainty (i.e., questions about their partner's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors involving the relationship); and relationship uncertainty (i.e., doubts about the relationship in general, such as the future of the relationship; Knobloch, 2008; Knobloch & Soloman, 2003). Indeed, relational uncertainty "encompasses all of the questions individuals have about participating in a close relationship" (Knobloch, 2008, p. 469).

In an examination of the specific sources of uncertainty experienced by couples in their marriage, Knobloch (2008) uncovered that spouses are most uncertain about children, communication, career issues (including job security), finances (e.g., whether they have enough money to buy a house, pay bills), health, commitment, extended family, sex, retirement (including involving their retirement planning) and religious beliefs, leisure time, and household chores. After identifying these themes, Knobloch (2008) created measures of relational uncertainty, proceeding to find that relational uncertainty is negatively associated with marital quality, particularly with respect to uncertainty regarding sex and communication but also regarding financial uncertainty. Financial uncertainty was measured by the following three items: "uncertainty regarding how to spend the money you and your spouse have; the financial situation within your marriage; and how to manage the money you and your spouse have" (p. 480). Financial uncertainty was uncovered to be negatively correlated with satisfaction and trust, suggesting that the more financial uncertainty couples report, the less satisfaction and trust they have in their relationship (Knobloch, 2008). Additionally, spouses experiencing even mild relational uncertainty may perceive their partners' messages more negatively (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007), underscoring the potentially deleterious effect that relational uncertainty can have on marriages.

Uncertainty has also been heavily explored outside the communication studies' discipline. In the field of nursing, Mishel (1988) created a model of uncertainty in illness, which has heavily influenced the development of Uncertainty Management Theory. In stark contrast to the foundation of URT (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), Mishel (1988, 1990) reconceptualized the connotation of uncertainty from negative to nuanced. Heavily relying on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress, appraisal, and coping, Mishel posits that uncertainty begins as a neutral cognitive state which varies in valance depending on whether people appraise the uncertainty as positive, negative, or neutral. Based on these appraisals, people then decide how to cope in order to best adapt to the uncertainty (Mishel, 1988, 1990). In other words, Mishel (1988, 1990) perceives uncertainty not necessarily as an undesirable state that people always want to reduce but something that people *manage* in a number of ways. As Mishel (1990) explains: "Although uncertainty refers to important concerns, it is not considered to be a dreaded or desired state until the implications of the uncertainty are determined…there is the potential for many diverse evaluations and conclusions about the uncertainty" (p. 256). If uncertainty is appraised as a threat, people attempt to reduce uncertainty; if uncertainty is appraised as positive, people strive to maintain the ambiguity (Mishel, 1990).

Mishel (1990) revised her model, originally developed to understand uncertainty during acute illness, to explain the experiences of uncertainty during chronic illness, a time in which uncertainty is a fixture of life. "Unlike uncertainty in acute illness—where the uncertainty is somewhat localized in the issues of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery—the uncertainty in chronic illness involves more areas of life and influences daily routines and activities" (Mishel, 1999, p. 269). Mishel (1990) posits that people experiencing chronic illness must constantly negotiate a variety of unknowns about their symptoms, illness, and future.

Mishel (1990) also maintains that uncertainty is not restricted to one context but can spread throughout different parts of life (e.g., uncertainty from illness can result in uncertainty relating to financial stability; see Brashers et al., 2003; Stone & Jones, 2009). Additionally, uncertainty is a process, as uncertainty appraisals can evolve over time. People can resolve uncertainty about one area of life only to experience it in another context or uncertainty can morph from a danger to an opportunity and vice versa (Mishel, 1990). Further, particularly with respect to chronic illness, uncertainty that was originally perceived as negative can be viewed as positive if people reassess uncertainty as part of the "natural rhythm to life" (Mishel, 1990, p. 260), and an "inescapable part of reality" (Mishel, 1990, p. 261). People's world views, often shaped by religious beliefs, can help them make meaning and become resilient (Landau, 2007). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assert that people draw on a variety of personal resources for coping with uncertainty and stress, including social support, social skills (including communication and problem-solving skills), health and energy, and positive beliefs (e.g., existential beliefs). Indeed, individual factors, such as features of people's personality, including a need for control, spirituality, and demographics such as education, age, and socioeconomic status, can influence how people view and manage uncertainty (Mishel, 1997). In fact, spirituality can help people manage uncertainty in chronic illness (Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty, Livneh, & Wilson, 2004).

UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT THEORY

Informed by research on how people living with HIV/AIDS manage uncertainty through communication (e.g., Brashers, Neidig, Haas, Dobbs, Cardillo, & Russell, 2000), Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001) has emerged as a refined communication lens through which to examine and understand uncertainty. UMT consists of the following nine principles:

> Principle One: Uncertainty is a perception about insufficient knowledge, which has both cognitive and affective components. Principle Two: There are many sources and forms of uncertainty. Principle Three: There are many sources and forms of information. Principle Four: The relationship between information and uncertainty is not straightforward. Principle Five: Uncertainty is appraised for its meaning. Principle Six: Interacting with information can reduce, maintain, or increase uncertainty. Principle Seven: Encountering new information fuels the re-appraisal of uncertainty. Principle Eight: Gathering information is often a social process, and includes collaborators in an individual's social network. Principle Nine: Uncertainty is not inherently good or inherently bad, but something that is managed (Hogan & Brashers, 2009, p. 48).

Thus, consistent with the uncertainty in illness model (Mishel, 1988, 1990), UMT posits that uncertainty is neither inherently aversive nor beneficial but that its meaning comes from the positive, negative, or neutral ways in which it is appraised (Brashers, 2001; Brashers et al., 2000). Additionally, UMT posits that uncertainty does not automatically cause anxiety (as maintained by some scholars; e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida 2001), but that uncertainty can evoke such emotions as hope, optimism, thrill, insecurity, and torment (Brashers et al., 2000). UMT further states that people can "manipulate" uncertainty to accomplish their goals (Brashers, 2006). As Brashers (2001) explains:

> Although people quite often do want to reduce complexity and ambiguity in their lives, perhaps as a prerequisite to decision making, planning, or predicting the behavior of others, there are other times when uncertainty allows people to maintain hope and optimism or when tasks can be performed despite, or because of, uncertainty (p. 478).

Indeed, some researchers argue that uncertainty is valuable because it helps create meaning in life (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009; Weick et al., 2005) and can generate desirable excitement or novelty in relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

UMT has also been guided by URT's key tenet regarding the fundamental role communication plays in responding to uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Bradac, 2001; Brashers, 2006). Unlike URT, however, UMT maintains that communication (i.e., information) can be used not only to reduce, but to maintain and even increase one's own or others' uncertainty (Brashers, 2001). Such a "shift to an uncertainty management heuristic allows for communication to be implicated in both the reduction and promotion of uncertainty" (Berger, 2011, p. 200). In this way, communication remains paramount in managing uncertainty. In contrast to URT, however, UMT posits that uncertainty is not limited to initial interactions but may exist whenever there is a "discrepancy between expectations and desires in any domain whatsoever" (Bradac, 2001, p. 466).

Appraisal of Uncertainty

UMT seeks to identify the sources of uncertainty with which people are faced as well as how people manage uncertainty and the challenges involved in uncertainty management (Hogan & Brashers, 2009). To this end, consistent with the model of uncertainty in illness (Mishel; 1988, 1990), UMT relies on the stress, appraisal and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to explore how people experience and manage uncertainty. UMT posits that when people are faced with the neutral state of uncertainty, they evaluate the extent to which they view the uncertainty as positive (i.e., a challenge or opportunity), stressful (i.e., creating harm, loss, anxiety, or fear), or irrelevant (i.e., inconsequential to their goals or easily resolved; see also Brashers, 2006). This initial evaluation is called a primary appraisal. People then engage in a secondary appraisal, in which they decide what, if anything, they can do to manage their uncertainty, based on their resources and capacity for responding and coping. Appraisals can shift, as is the case with reappraisal, when an appraisal is modified, for example, based on additional information. Similarly, uncertainty can become more or less relevant over time (Babrow & Kline, 2000; Goldsmith, 2009). Additionally, as Mishel (1990) identified, uncertainties are interrelated, as one type of uncertainty can often lead to another. While people generally focus their attention on managing uncertainty that is more controllable, it is possible to simultaneously manage more than one type of uncertainty (Hines, 2001).

Management of Uncertainty

Based on how people appraise uncertainty, they endeavor to manage it by reducing, increasing, maintaining, or adapting to uncertainty (Brashers, 2006), largely through communication (e.g., Babrow et al., 1998; Brashers, 2006; Brashers et al., 2000). In managing uncertainty people seek, reveal, conceal, and avoid information—all "collaborative activities that require negotiation and coordination among participants" (Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002, p. 266).

When uncertainty is appraised as negative, people strive to reduce uncertainty by, consistent with URT, searching for information, such as talking with others or, in the case of illness, reading about their condition (Brashers et al., 2000). People can seek information actively (e.g., deliberately searching for information from a variety of sources); passively (e.g., coming upon information, as in associating with people or environments in which information may be shared); and experientially (e.g., acquiring information through their own experiences or familiarity with events; Brashers et al., 2000).

Others can also help manage uncertainty (Brashers, 2006), e.g., through social support (e.g., Brashers, 2001). Brashers (2006) defines social support as “when people provide encouragement and assistance to help others through major and minor life hassles” (p. 233). Social support involves providing uncertain individuals with direct and indirect aid in gathering and evaluating information, helping them learn new skills, and making them feel accepted and validated (Brashers, Neidig, & Goldsmith, 2004). It is also possible for people to manage uncertainty management, for example, managing others’ uncertainty by withholding stressful information from them (Brashers, 2006).

UMT also maintains that when people view uncertainty as beneficial, hopeful, an opportunity, or preferable to achieving certainty about an issue, they choose to maintain it, for instance, by avoiding information (e.g., staying clear of topics or situations in which information could be shared or selectively ignoring information) that could make them feel more or less certain (Brashers, 2001, 2006) or could provide them with undesired closure (Brashers et al., 2000). In this way, “avoidance can shield people from information that is overwhelming and distressing and can provide escape from a distressing certainty by maintaining uncertainty” (Brashers, 2001, p. 483). Avoidance strategies include direct information avoidance, selective attention, selective ignoring, social withdrawl, suppressing currently held knowledge, or discounting negative information (Brashers, 2001). Avoidance can be both subconscious and conscious attempts to preserve “psychological well-being when information is threatening or overwhelming” (Brashers et al., 2000, p. 73).

Individuals who wish to maintain their current certainty levels prefer the ambiguity and desire to sustain their preexisting psychological state (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Brashers, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, sometimes people prefer not to know potentially distressing or overwhelming information, as in the case of genetic or HIV testing (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Wahlin, 2007). People may also avoid situations in which upsetting information may be discussed; stress may also cause people to "retreat from information (Brashers et al., 2000). In addition, people who want to be more uncertain (e.g., because uncertainty provides them hope) can increase their uncertainty by seeking out contradictory or encouraging information (Brashers, 2006; Brashers et al., 2000).

Additionally, when people perceive uncertainty as an indelible part of life (e.g., as can be the case with long-term illness), they often learn to adapt to chronic uncertainty (e.g., Mishel, 1990). Through this process people come to cope with constant uncertainty through such strategies as trusting one's partner, relying on a higher power, ignoring the uncertainty-producing event (Brashers, 2001; Emmers & Canary, 1996), focusing on short-term planning and daily life versus preparing for the future, reevaluating life priorities, and creating routines and structure in the areas of life they can control (Brashers, 2006), similar to emotional habituation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In fact, some research suggests that the longer chronically-ill patients live with uncertainty, the more positively they appraise it (Mishel, 1990). Adaptation to uncertainty can enable people to grow through the establishment of a new value system (Mishel, 1999).

The aforementioned uncertainty management strategies closely align with the concepts of problem-and-emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping is an approach geared toward resolving the external problem, such as by searching for information, weighing and devising solutions, and relying on social support, as well as coping with internal barriers, such as learning new skills and changing one's behavior (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping aims to help people manage how they feel about a stressor by decreasing or increasing emotional distress (e.g., through avoidance, minimization, or distancing from the stressor and reappraising the situation; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping is used to "maintain hope and optimism, to deny both fact and implication, to refuse to acknowledge the worst, to act if what happened did not matter, and so on" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 151). These coping strategies outlined by Lazarus and Folkman coincide with the ways in which people reduce, increase, maintain, and adapt to uncertainty and illustrate the strong theoretical grounding upon which UMT is based.

Barriers to Uncertainty Management

When people successfully cope with uncertainty, adaptation occurs (Mishel, 1990). However, individuals are not always effective in these efforts (Brashers, 2001) if they face dilemmas in managing uncertainty. Uncertainty-management barriers are largely due to the nature of the uncertainty, the information available, and the person's management abilities. Sometimes, as much as people would like to reduce their uncertainty, there may be a shortage or an overload of information, or the information needed to reduce it may not exist or may be too complicated, making such a decline in uncertainty unlikely or impossible (Babrow & Kline, 2000). Additionally, in the process of trying to reduce their uncertainty, people may inadvertently increase it through accidental exposure to information (e.g., due to media saturation; Brashers et al., 2002). The information may also be inaccurate or untrustworthy, which can increase uncertainty (Brashers et al., 2000). In this way, communication itself can be a source of uncertainty (Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008; Goldsmith, 2009).

Another impediment to uncertainty management is the reality that some people may not be as cognitively well equipped to conduct research, seek information, or interact with others (Brashers et al., 2000; Mishel, 1988), especially during times of extreme stress or anxiety (Brashers et al., 2002). Additional coping constraints include personal barriers (e.g., resisting help because assistance threatens cultural or personal values or out of protection for another) and environmental obstacles (e.g., due to competing demands for the same resources, people have to decide which stressors they can confront; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Last, sociocultural contexts can affect how information is managed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), as people may value information differently based on their culture or upbringing. As much as people may want to manage uncertainty, the effectiveness of these efforts may vary.

Real-World Applications

UMT is a practical and applied theory (Berger, 2011; Brashers, 2001, 2006) that helps explain how people use communication to negotiate a variety of uncertain circumstances. Because of its real world significance, UMT has been employed by scholars committed to conducting "socially meaningful research" (Afifi & Afifi, 2009, p. 4) across disciplines (Berger, 2005, 2011). Originally applied to communication involved in managing illness-related uncertainty, UMT has been used to understand uncertainty experienced in a number of diverse and important contexts, including family, health, and organizational settings.

Family

UMT has guided examinations of how families navigate the unknown, including the uncertainty faced by post-divorce families negotiating the status of their family (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003) and uncertainty surrounding children's adoptive status (e.g., questions about medical history, heritage, and the identity of their birth parents; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Powell & Afifi, 2005). Consistent with UMT, Afifi and Schrodt (2003) found that people sometimes prefer to maintain uncertainty because the uncertainty can serve a purpose. For example, children maintained uncertainty about the state of their postdivorce family by avoiding communication about changes in family life. The uncertainty was more desirable than potentially hearing negative information about family members or engaging in conflict with them.

Additional research has studied uncertainty within the context of adoption. Powell and Afifi (2005) sought to learn how uncertainty manifests itself in adoptees' perceptions of their birth parents. They uncovered that adoptees' experience of uncertainty ranged from no uncertainty (complete acceptance of their adoptive families) and moderate uncertainty (some questions about their background) to high uncertainty (many unanswered questions, strong need for closure). Participants who experienced uncertainty sought to reduce their uncertainty through seeking information (e.g., researching their birth parent online); indirect communication (e.g., asking a third party to contact their birth parent); strategic communication (e.g., strategically drafting a letter to their birth parent); or gaining cultural knowledge (e.g., researching their heritage). Other participants chose to maintain their uncertainty for a variety of reasons, including fear of rejection and not wanting to offend their adoptive parents.

More recently, Colaner and Kranstuber (2010) interviewed adoptees to uncover the ways in which they experienced and managed uncertainty surrounding their adoptive identity. Adoptees were uncertain about the meaning of their adoption, details about their birth parents, and how their adoptive parents felt about their birth parents. However, adoptees were either unmotivated to reduce uncertainty, apprehensive, or unable to reduce uncertainty. The study found that adoptive parents enlisted several strategies to help adoptive children manage uncertainty, including discussing the details of the adoption, empowering the children to develop a strong adoptive identity, and normalizing adoption (treating adoption as a regular part of life).

This research demonstrates the important role that communication plays in managing uncertainty within a family context. Just as families manage ambiguity surrounding divorce and adoption, it is likely that couples will turn to one another to negotiate their financial "unknowns." Depending on families' economic status, uncertainty may involve unpredictability about how to make ends meet, how to pay down credit card debt, where to invest money, or whether couples are saving sufficiently for retirement and/or their children's education. Couples are also likely to experience uncertainty about such issues as potential changes in family roles after a layoff or pay cut, their level of financial knowledge, or how to effectively discuss finances with their spouse. Understanding the sources of uncertainty faced by couples and the strategies they use to manage it will shed light on a critical but largely overlooked family process with real-world implications.

Health

Originally applied to uncertainty in illness contexts (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Brashers et al., 2003), UMT has largely been used to understand how people experience and manage uncertainty stemming from acute and chronic diseases. In addition to identifying several sources of uncertainty (e.g., medical, personal, and social) and describing ways in which people manage uncertainty (including reducing uncertainty, maintaining uncertainty, and adapting to chronic ambiguity), health research has demonstrated that people seek to increase uncertainty if it offers them hope (Brashers et al., 2000). Additionally, positive health events, such as health improvements (or "revival") can actually cause uncertainty and be appraised negatively if people worry about the recurrence of an illness, their ability to return to regular life, their identity and roles, and the effects of their improved health on relationships (e.g., Brashers, Neidig, Cardillo, Dobbs, Russell, & Haas, 1999).

Health literature framed by UMT has several implications for financial communication. Similar to the notion of personal uncertainty that emerged from UMT-informed health research, the costs of medical care (such as affording medical procedures and health insurance and reducing health care debt) could be sources of uncertainty that couples need to manage communicatively. Additionally, managing a job loss or the threat of unemployment could be another source of personal uncertainty, as the person's professional and familial roles may change. Further, similar to individuals who experience chronic health problems, people who are chronically financially uncertain (e.g., the long-term low-income) likely need to learn to cope with their financial situation in order to adapt to daily life. Examining this process will inform how people can make ends meet in the face of financial hardship.

Organizational

While not always examined using an UMT lens, uncertainty has surfaced as a major issue facing employees and employers (e.g., Clampitt & Williams, 2005). Job skills, job transfers, job security (Brashers, 2001; Kramer, 1993) and relationships with co-workers can all be sources of uncertainty (Brashers, 2006). Uncertainty can also arise from organizational changes (e.g., Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gollois, & Callan, 2004; Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004) and the state of the economy (e.g., Brashers, 2001; Brashers, 2006; Clampitt & Williams, 2005). Additionally, as with uncertainty in illness, organizational uncertainty can be both acute (e.g., uncertainty leading up to an annual review) and chronic (e.g., with respect to ongoing job insecurity, e.g., Heaney, Israeli, and Houses, 1994). As employment-related circumstances as well as the economy are sources of uncertainty for many workers (e.g., Schreurs, Van Emmerik, Gunter, & Germeys, 2012), especially during tumultuous times, it is likely that these issues will be salient in couples' financial communication.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Influenced by the tenets of URT (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), Mishel's uncertainty in illness model (1988; 1990), and the theory of stress, appraisal, and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001) has emerged as a nuanced and practical theory for elucidating the critical ways in which communication can be used to manage uncertainty in a variety of important everyday life contexts (Brashers, 2006). UMT is a particularly relevant lens in which to uncover how couples experience and manage financial uncertainty in everyday interaction. As Brashers (2001) explains, "Understanding various types of uncertainty enhances our ability to describe and explain its influences on behavior and to develop strategies for improving people's lives" (p. 479).

While Knobloch (2008) uncovered that finances can be a source of uncertainty experienced by marital partners (e.g., with respect to how to spend and manage money, as well as the couple's financial situation), the specific sources of that uncertainty and the ways in which couples manage financial uncertainty have not yet been studied. By examining financial communication through the lens of UMT, the current study aims to explore how couples negotiate minor and major financial decisions, manage both prosperous and difficult economic times, handle cultural pressures, and enact financial roles and identities. An application of UMT to family financial communication will provide researchers with critical insight into how individuals in romantic relationships negotiate acute and chronic financial uncertainty. In this way, the current study will further the development of the theory while uncovering tangible strategies people can use to effectively manage finances and money.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With respect to future directions of UMT, Brashers (2006) maintains that, "Communication scholars should continue to focus on three connected areas: the experience and meaning of uncertainty; appraisal and emotional responses to uncertainty; and corresponding communication behaviors" (pp. 236-37). After all, "learning to manage uncertainty is an important life skill that communication researchers can help people develop" (p. 237). Using Uncertainty Management Theory (Brashers, 2001) as this study's guiding theoretical framework, the following research questions were explored through interviews of individuals in cohabitating or married relationships:

RQ1: What types of financial uncertainty do participants experience?

RQ2: How do participants manage financial uncertainty?

RQ3: What barriers to uncertainty management do participants face?

Chapter Four: Method

This chapter provides information about the method, participants, procedure, and instruments used to collect the data that were analyzed in this qualitative research study.

USE OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Unlike quantitative research, which numerically predicts and explains relationships to make sense of the world (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), the goal of qualitative research is to understand participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, feelings, behaviors, and inherent contradictions on a level much richer than can be captured quantitatively (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lindolf & Taylor, 2002).

Qualitative research goes beyond numbers to tell stories about real people and how and why they feel, act, and believe what they do; capturing the essence of individuals' lived experiences (e.g., Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). As it is particularly important to study how communication is affected by larger social forces (Duck, 2008), qualitative research enables scholars to identify how social norms, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and religion affect experiences. These are elements that quantitative research cannot capture as accurately or vividly, and helps explain why qualitative research is so valuable (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindolf & Taylor, 2002).

Qualitative research, through the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, has frequently been the source of data analyzed by UMT (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Colaner & Kranstuber, 2010; Middleton, LaVoie, & Brown, 2012; Powell & Afifi, 2005). As Mishel (1999) privileges the use of qualitative methods for new realms of uncertainty research, and qualitative methods are particularly useful for exploring sensitive topics and/or under-explored phenomenon (Keyton, 2011), qualitative methods were used in the present investigation. Due to the potentially uncomfortable nature of the topic under investigation, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were employed in order to deeply explore each participant's reports of financial communication with his or her partner while safeguarding confidentiality and avoiding the risk of groupthink that can accompany focus group interviews (Babbie, 2007). One-on-one interviews, "modeled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange" (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002, p. 88) enable meaning to be gleamed from people's unique, first-hand experiences. As Donovan-Kicken and Bute (2008) explain, interviews enable participants "to share a wide array of complex responses about their uncertainty experiences and imbue their responses with illustrative details about sources of uncertainty and management of uncertainty" (p. 8).

PARTICIPANTS

Researchers across disciplines have long relied on college student samples. Since 1932, 45% of research on close relationships has been conducted with college students (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). However, as Rogers (2006) maintains, it is important for family communication scholars to recruit a wider pool of participants, including individuals of diverse races, ages, socioeconomic statues, and cultures. The current study heeded this call by recruiting a multicultural, non-college student sample from an economically- and racially-diverse small Midwestern community.

The town itself has been referred to as a case study for the economic problems currently facing the country, particularly the Midwest. Originally settled as a farming community, the town prospered as a result of industrialization, even receiving All-American City designation in the 1970s. However, over the past several decades, deindustrialization has greatly harmed the town. The town has experienced numerous plant, factory, school, and store closings, as well as the departure of its hospital, the fleeing of many residents, and a decline in jobs and property values. At the same time, the town is afforded advantages not experienced by other economically-struggling communities, as it is home to a nationally-ranked college. Residents are offered educational, cultural, and recreational options as well as free services (e.g., income tax preparation, tutoring/mentoring) by this institution of higher learning.

With respect to the current investigation, adults living with their spouse or domestic partner in the town or surrounding vicinity were eligible to participate in individual face-to-face, semi-structured interviews regarding how couples talk about money and finances. Couples did not need to be married or heterosexual. Participants in married or cohabiting relationships were recruited as the literature finds that finances can be a considerable source of conflict in romantic relationships (e.g., Dew, 2009; Erbert, 2000; Zietlow & Sillars, 1988) and that partners can play an important role in determining whether and how couples adapt to economic struggle (e.g., Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger, Reuter, & Elder, 1999). Participation was limited to one member of the couple to minimize recruitment challenges.

Each participant received a $10 gift card to the local grocery store (part of a regional chain) for partaking in the interview. The gift cards were funded by a small research grant awarded to the author by the local college. (The remainder of the grant was used to fund undergraduate research assistants to transcribe the interviews.) Employees of the local college were restricted from participating in the study due to accounting regulations (the employees would have been required to report the gift cards as taxable income, which would have compromised the confidentiality of the study), but their non-college-affiliated partners were eligible.

Data were collected during the spring of 2011. After the study was approved by the local college's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix D; the author later received IRB approval from her graduate institution), participants were recruited through several means. First, after securing permission from owners or managers, the author posted tear-off flyers announcing the survey on windows of stores and restaurants on streets with heavy foot traffic, as well as on the town grocery store's community bulletin board. Additionally, the author twice distributed an announcement about the study via the town's electronic newsletter. The author also emailed information about the study to community and religious leaders and requested that they forward study details to their contacts or provide her with contact information for potential participants. All recruitment materials stressed that the interview would be completely confidential.

Additionally, the author relied on snowball sampling to recruit participants. Following the completion of interviews, the author asked participants for the contact information of any friends or acquaintances who qualified for the study and would be willing to potentially participate. After concluding his interview, one participant proceeded to walk the author to his friend's home, introduce her to his friend, explain the merits of the study to his friend, and schedule an interview with his friend for 30 minutes later. To further aid in recruitment, the author also provided participants with flyers and business-card-sized information about the study to take with them to distribute to possible participants.

The author interviewed 40 people for this study. Sixty percent of the participants (n= 24) were women and 40% (n= 16) were men. Ninety-five percent (n = 38) of the sample was heterosexual and of these participants, approximately 84% (n = 32) were married. Two (5%) of the participants were members of cohabitating lesbian relationships. Of the total participants, 67.5% (n = 27) identified as Caucasian or White; 12.5% (n = 5) were Black or African American; 7.5% (n = 3) were Hispanic or Latino(a) and Other respectively; 2.5% (n = 1) labeled themselves as Asian or Pacific Islander; and

2.5% (n = 1) was American Indian or Alaskan Native. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 76 (M = 50.8; SD= 14.4). The number of children participants had ranged from none to seven (M = 2.5; SD= 1.6).

The participants' highest educational level ranged from some high school (n = 1; 2.5%) to doctoral degree, including a law degree (n = 3; 7.5%). Participants' other highest education levels included: high school degree (n = 7; 17.5%); post-high school vocational training (n = 2; 5%); some college (n = 4; 10%); associate's degree (n = 4; 10%); bachelor's degree (n = 3; 7.5%); some post-graduate work (n = 3; 7.5%); and master's degree/ MBA (n = 12; 30%). One participant did not provide this information. Twenty-one participants (52.5%) worked full-time outside of the home; six (15%) were employed part-time; one (2.5%) reported small business owner, one (2.5%) reported part-time/retired; three (7.5%) were retired; seven participants (17.5%) were not employed; and one (2.5%) participant did not respond. Twenty-five (62.5%) of the participants' partners worked full-time; one (2.5%) of the participants' partners worked outside of the home part-time; one (2.5%) was both retired and worked part-time; one (2.5%) of the participants' partners worked outside of the home part-time; four (10%) were not employed; and one (2.5%) participant declined to answer. In addition to those who were retired or unemployed, participants held a wide variety of professions, including restaurant owner, bank executive, city administrator, attorney, teacher, factory worker, librarian, and fundraiser.

With respect to the participants' financial information, yearly participant incomes ranged from \$0-24,999 a year (n = 12; 20%) to \$200,000-249,000 (n = 3; 7.5%). Additionally, seven participants (17%) reported an income of \$25,000-49,999; five (12.5%) reported \$50,000-\$74,999; eight (20%) reported \$75,000-99,999; three (7.5%) reported \$100,000-149,999; three (7.5%) participants elected not to answer, and one

(2.5%) participant reported "not applicable." Although participants were not directly asked for their combined household income, participants were asked to provide their yearly individual income range as well as their partner's income range (both ranges were in increments of $24,999). Combining these reports for both participant and participant partner income yielded household incomes ranging from $0-24,999 (*n* = 1; 2.5%) to 300,000-399,998 (*n* = 1; 2.5%). The other combined income levels included $0-49,999 (*n* = 3; 7.5%); $25,000-49,999 (*n* =4; 10%); $25,000-74,998 (*n* = 5; 12.5%); $50,000-99,998 (*n* = 6; 15%); $75,000-124,998 (*n* = 7; 17.5%); $100,000-149, 998 (*n* = 3; 7.5%); $100,000-174,998 (*n* = 1; 2.5%); $125,000-174,998 (*n* = 1; 2,5%); $150,000-199,998 (*n* = 1; 2,5%); $150,000-224,998 (*n* = 1; 2.5%); $175,000-249,998 (*n* = 1; 2.5%). Additionally, four (10%) participants declined to answer, and 1 (2.5%) reported "not applicable."

Participants were also asked about the level of savings and debt their household had acquired. The amount of household saving participants reported ranged from $0-4,999 (*n* = 10; 25%) to $100,000 and up (*n* = 12; 30%). Other savings levels included $5,000-9,999 (*n* = 4; 10%); $10,000-24,999 (*n* = 3; 7.5%); $25,000-49,999 (*n* = 1; 2.5%); $50,000-49,999 (*n* = 2; 5%); and $75,000-99,999 (*n* = 4; 10%). Two participants reported "not applicable" and one participant did not report this information. Participants' household debt also ranged from $0-4,999 (*n* = 12; 20%) to $100,000 and up (*n* =2; 5%). Additionally, six (15%) participants reported owing $5,000-9,999; six (15%) reported owing $10,000-24,999; one (2.5%) reported owing $25,000-49,999; seven (17.5%) reported owing $50,000-74,999; three (7.5%) reported owing $75,000-99,999; one participant wrote "not applicable" and two chose not to respond to this item.

PROCEDURE

After the participants were selected, the author confirmed a date, time, and place for the interviews. The interviews ranged from 16 to 71 minutes, for approximately 1,253 total minutes of active interviewing. The average interview lasted just over 32 minutes (not including time to complete an accompanying demographic survey following the interview). Interviews were conducted at a public location of the participant's choosing, generally on the college campus (such as in the student union), at the public library, at the local McDonald's, or at the participant's workplace. Participants were interviewed individually to ensure openness of responses (although in a couple of instances, participants' young children accompanied them to the interview, where they amused themselves with toys or books).

The interviews were audio recorded for transcription and analysis. The author's research assistants fully transcribed each interview using online transcription software, generating roughly 386 pages (M = 9.7 pages per participant) of transcribed, single-spaced text. In order to ensure accuracy of transcription, prior to analysis the author listened to the audio recording of each interview and reviewed each transcription, editing as needed, as recommended by Braun and Clark (2006). To protect the participants' privacy, the author assigned a pseudonym to each participant and generalized their occupations when possible (for example, broadly describing a participant as a factory worker instead of reporting his or her specific type of factory job). Additionally, the author will not refer to the town by name.

Instruments

Building rapport and gaining participants' trust is important when interviewing (Charmaz, 2006; Lindolf & Taylor, 2002), particularly when questioning participants about sensitive topics, such as finances. After all, interviewing people about money and finances "…can feel more intrusive than talking about sexual relations" (Pahl, 2000, p. 506). As Treas (1993) explains, "Money… doesn't lend itself to conversation…Even the most intimate of social networks seems not to penetrate the privacy of marital finances" (p. 727). It is thus possible that participants could feel vulnerable talking about finances, especially considering that people commonly choose not to disclose their income, even in anonymous surveys and questionnaires (Ross & Reynolds, 1996).

To combat these potential limitations, upon meeting the participants, the author engaged in rapport building (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002) by demonstrating to participants that she appreciated their help, valued their time, and respected and would not judge their responses. The author began each interview by introducing herself and thanking the participants for their time and willingness to help with her research. The author then mentioned that little information was known about how couples actually talk about finances, that there were no correct or incorrect responses, and that by participating in the interview they would be helping people learn more about a very important issue.

Due to the taboo nature of the study, prior to asking interview questions, the author sought to put participants at ease and gain their trust by engaging in small talk about the weather, the interview site, community events, and/or her background and interest in the topic. As the author was residing in the town during the period of data collection, she was well aware of local activities. In order to come across as approachable, the author made a conscious effort to accommodate the participants' rate and style of speaking (e.g., speaking slower if the participants spoke slowly, using similar fillers or jargon in an attempt to converge with participants). Further, the author deliberately dressed in attire that would not come across as intimidating yet would still garner respect—generally business casual clothing during the week and jeans for weekend interviews. In these ways, the author sought to establish the interviews as conversational, relaxed, and informative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After reminding the participants about the approximate length of the interview and asking if they had any questions or concerns, the author informed participants that at any point during the interview they could choose to skip questions or discontinue the interview and that their responses would not be shared with their partner and would remain completely confidential. Next, after obtaining the participants' written consent (see Appendix C), the author began the interviews by asking introductory questions about their relational status, length of time they and their partner had been together, and their and their partner's employment situation and perceived economic status. The author followed up by asking specific questions about the ways in which the couples handled money, including which financial roles they adopted and why, and how participants felt about these arrangements.

The author then segued into questions about the extent to which participants' and partners' views on money were similar or different and how participants felt about their partners' views, what money- and financial-related topics they and their partner did (not) talk about and why, and how they felt about those conversations, as well as which topics they wished they and their partner did (not) talk about and why. Finally, the author asked participants to reflect on challenges they had faced in talking about money with their partner, including the financial topics that had been the biggest source of conflict in their relationship, their childhood economic background, and how their parents talked with them about money. Participants were also asked how conversations with their partner may have changed with the economy or when they experienced financial struggle or transition, as well as what worried them about money and the extent to which they discussed these financial worries and stressors with their partner (see Appendix A for the complete interview schedule).

The author followed a standardized interview schedule but asked follow-up questions and delved deeper on questions as opportunities naturally emerged. In order to maintain rapport, the author engaged in active listening and keenly sought to make meaning of what the participant was saying by attempting to ask thoughtful follow-up questions and thoroughly engage the participant during the interview. At times the author employed reciprocity with participants by sharing her own personal anecdotes (e.g., an example of her and her husband's discussions about money, or her husband's spending habits) to generate and sustain trust and encourage sharing (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). The author ended each interview on a positive note by asking what else participants wanted to add and thanking them for their time.

At the conclusion of the interview, the author asked participants to complete a short closed-ended demographic questionnaire which included such items as salary range and occupation (see Appendix B for the demographic survey). The author instructed participants that they could leave blank any items with which they were uncomfortable or did not want to answer.

Analysis

Consistent with techniques employed by Donovan-Kicken and Bute (2008), the author did not enter this investigation with UMT as a sensitizing framework (Blumer, 1954). While participants in the current study were asked about the economy, as well as periods of hardship and sources of financial worry, the current investigation broadly explored the experiences of financial communication without prompting participants to talk about uncertainty. Nevertheless, uncertainty about various aspects of finances naturally emerged as a dominant theme in participants' responses, even though the interview schedule did not include specific questions related to uncertainty. In this way, the theoretical framework inductively surfaced.

Other researchers have also adopted this inductive approach, identifying uncertainty as a major theme that emerged in their data even though this phenomenon was not targeted in their interview questions. For example, Allen et al. (2007) interviewed employees about workforce change events (e.g., implementation of new products, relocation, restructuring), asking general questions about the change (e.g., what changes occurred and their effect on the employee, how workers heard about the changes, the effectiveness of this information). The researchers did not specifically ask about uncertainty, but rather uncertainty surfaced as a theme and the authors framed their study using the lens of UMT. Similarly, Middleton et al. (2012) centered their study on the medical, social, and personal sources of uncertainty faced by people living with diabetes; however only one question in their interview schedule pertained to uncertainty.

Analysis of data in the current study began with the author listening to the recording of each interview and comparing the audio recording to the interview transcript to ensure accuracy of transcription. At this time, the author sanitized the transcripts by eliminating any identifying information and assigning pseudonyms to participants. The author also recorded notes on her initial impressions of the data. After reviewing the transcripts at least twice, the author employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to organize and code the data into conceptual categories and themes. Using open coding, the author began making sense of the data by independently analyzing all of the transcripts line by line and, by comparing the transcripts to each other, classifying similar units of data into macro-level groupings and themes (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). The author paid particular attention to such linguistic markers of uncertainty as “maybe,” “possibly,” “(un)clear,” “(un)sure,” “(un)confident,” “anxious,” and “worried” (Babrow & Kline, 2000, p. 1813). Simultaneously, the author conduced in vivo coding, in which she isolated examples of participants’ own language to support the categories and serve as exemplars (Chamaz, 2006; Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). Next, the author returned to the data to conduct second-order data analysis by comparing the transcripts to one another in order to reduce the categories and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By engaging in axial coding, the author collapsed the categories that had emerged (e.g., unsure how to make ends meet; lack of investment knowledge) into a unifying theme of uncertainty.

Next, using UMT (Brashers, 2001) as a sensitizing framework (Blumer, 1954), the author engaged in a thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). While this stage of data analysis was informed by the uncertainty management literature, codes were not predetermined but emerged naturally from the data. The author reread the transcripts to specifically uncover patterns and themes related to participants’ experience and management of uncertainty, using constant comparative techniques to identify categories, themes, and exemplars pertaining to uncertainty. In order for themes to emerge, recurrence (the same topic must surface at least twice), repetition (the same phrases must be repeated), and forcefulness (particular text must be emphasized) had to exist (Owen, 1984). By comparing the transcripts to one another, the author then condensed the themes. For example, the initial themes “worried about making ends meet” and “unsure how to pay the bills,” based upon coding lines of text which reflected these themes, were reduced to one category that was assigned the broader conceptual label of chronic uncertainty.

In order to determine the validity of the study‘s findings, the author engaged in member checking, “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985, p. 314). Member checking involves a researcher presenting participants with his or her results and ascertaining whether the investigator has accurately captured participants' experiences and meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The author emailed the study's main themes and general findings to the 22 participants for whom she had current contact information to determine if the categories and findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' reality and whether participants found the findings representative of the experiences of the local community (Crewsell & Miller, 2000). The five participants who responded (23% of this subsample; 12.5% of total participants) indicated that the author's narrative was trustworthy.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter detailed the study's method—semi-structured face-to-face interviews of 40 adults from a small Midwest town who were married or living with their romantic partner in the spring of 2011. Participants were diverse with respect to sex (60% female); race (32.5% did not classify themselves as Caucasian or White); education (participants' highest schooling ranged from some high school to doctorate); employment status and occupation (ranging from unemployed to retired; factory worker to lawyer); as well as amount of reported income, savings, and debt (ranging from $0-24,999 to more than $200,000). The chapter also delineated the data collection and analysis methods that were used to examine how couples negotiate financial uncertainty.

Chapter Five: Results: Types of Financial Uncertainty (RQ1)

The goal of this study was to explore how people experience and negotiate financial uncertainty. The results are presented in three sections: The first section addresses the types of financial uncertainty experienced by people in cohabitating or married relationships (RQ1), the second focuses on how people negotiate financial uncertainty (RQ2), and the third explores barriers to uncertainty management (RQ3).

Consistent with the finding that finances can be a source of uncertainty in relationships (Knobloch, 2008), the current investigation uncovered specific types of uncertainty faced by participants. With respect to the study's first research question, five types of uncertainty emerged: (1) economic uncertainty; (2) personal uncertainty; (3) family uncertainty; (4) communication uncertainty; and (5) chronic uncertainty. Economic uncertainty involves macro-level concerns related to the unpredictable nature of the economy, such as unemployment. Personal uncertainty relates to ambiguity about financial-related plans, beliefs, and identity. Family uncertainty involves uncertainty pertaining to partners' or extended family members' money management. Communication uncertainty reflects a sense of not knowing how to effectively discuss finances with one's romantic partner, and chronic uncertainty involves enduring ambiguity due to ongoing financial hardship.

ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

Most participants' reports indicated that the recent economic downturn had been a tremendous source of uncertainty, particularly because at the same time layoffs, wage cuts, and the cost of food and gas were increasing, home and investment values were plummeting. In the words of Maureen, 59 (a high school teacher whose husband is a vice president of sales and marketing, and who described their financial status as "rich"), at the time of the study everything was "tumultuous and unstable." Indeed, many participants expressed a sense of powerlessness over the economy and anxiety over the long-range consequences that losing their job, business, or value of their home could have on their family's well-being. As the economy is unpredictable yet directly connected to participants' livelihood, anxiety was salient. Economic uncertainty took the form of employment, housing, and general economic insecurity.

Employment Insecurity

As Joe, 64 (a fundraiser whose wife works at the local college and who described their economic status as secure following his return to work after one year of unemployment), explained, the economy:

> Has made everybody a little scared. Fear permeates the conversations, with us or everybody else, whether we're talking to each other or talking to our friends. It's like, "Boy, these aren't very good times."….Because I was unemployed for a year there, and…you know, it was kind of a double whammy; it was the pervading fear of the culture and the society plus the reality of losing my income and trying to find another position.

Joe's words reflect the anxiety he experienced coping with the unpredictable nature of the economy coupled with his own unemployment. Joe was not alone in confronting the uncertainty inherent in post-layoff life. Participants such as Nick, 40 (who runs a store during the day and performs janitorial work at night, whose wife works in home health care and who described their status as "working class, lower-middle I guess at this point") detailed the unknowns he and his wife faced with respect to making ends meet after he was laid off from his 14-year job at a factory.

Nick said he and his wife faced uncertainty regarding "what we were going to have to do to keep everything—the house, you know—and things steady and not have to…to where it would interfere with the kids or the kids would start thinking things were getting really bad." Nick said that after losing his job, "kind of a panic state, I guess, set in for a little bit…At that time we just didn't know what I was going to do. Everyone was laying off and, where to go, you know?" Not knowing how to locate a position after years of stable employment was a considerable source of ambiguity and stress for Nick. Even though he was able to find work, he was now earning less, and the family was not as financially secure as they had been when he held a higher-paying position. Nick perceived his current employment situation as tenuous. "After being laid off, you know, it worries you that the next job might not hold up," he explained. "You know, the way the economy's been, things haven't been the greatest." Two years after the layoff, Nick was still uncertain about his economic stability, as there was no guarantee that he might not be out of work again soon. Indeed, Kelly, 32 (an art director at a dance studio whose partner is an athletic trainer and described their financial status as "average for their age"), was confronted with uncertainty about how she and her partner would get by two years prior to the time of the interview, when the dance studio she inherited from her mother went out of business after 36 years of operation. For three months Kelly said she was not earning any money. It was "so stressful, so stressful," Kelly recalled.

As Kathy, 57 (who described her family's economic status as middle class and who works for the city; her husband is a service technician), acknowledged:

> Seeing how many positions have been lost here, you know, you never know. You think you're stable, but there's no such thing as a stable job. You've got to make sure you've got enough money to be able to support yourself because your unemployment only lasts for so long.

Similarly, as Ellen, 48 (a stay- at-home mother whose husband is a regional construction manager and described their financial status as comfortable), put it, “Job security is an iffy thing in this day and age.” Kathy and Ellen’s words reflect the unpredictable nature of the national and local economy and the lack of control participants possessed over their state of employment. There was a sense that anyone’s job could be lost and that no one’s livelihood was protected.

Because she does not work outside the home and her husband’s job is funded on soft money and thus not secure, April, 36 (a homemaker whose husband coaches at the local college and works at a school and who described their family’s status as “comfortable”) said, “I’m scared. You know, you do have that fear, that natural fear” about the possibility of her husband losing his job. Even people holding historically safeguarded positions were uncertain about their long-term employment prospects. Amy, 34 (a teacher whose husband works in maintenance at the college and described their economic status as lower-middle class), explained that she became a teacher in part for stable employment, but that that reality was no longer the case. Due to a shortage of state funds, raises had been discontinued and her salary was frozen and set to be reduced by a quantity that was undetermined at the time of the study. The unknown amount of the pay cut was a tremendous source of uncertainty for Amy, as the existing economic changes (no raises, frozen wages) had already greatly affected her family’s well-being. “We considered ourselves upper-middle class for [the town] until recently,” Amy said. “Then it was just strong middle class in terms of our friends and family. And now compared to our friends and family we’re definitely the poor ones.” As she further explained:

> We don’t want to be rich; we just want to have enough money to be comfortable. We want to be able to put food on the table without worrying, pay the utilities without worrying. We don’t even, we’ve never had new cars; we don’t even need

> new cars. We'd like to go on little trips, you know, with the family, nothing extravagant; we don't go on cruises or anything like that, but to go on a trip, you know, once a year, we would like to be able to do. We want to be able to, you know, buy the kids lessons, ballet, or you know, sports, or an instrument, you know. We just want to be comfortable. Neither of us wants to be rich but neither of us wants to be poor. And we've tried, you know, very hard to go to college and get degrees and make it so that we could be comfortable and just be in the middle class. And now the last couple years, you know, we've come to realize that I guess the promise that we were given by America is not going to come to pass like we had hoped, and we thought we did all the right things. You know, we went, got our degrees, and I got two master's degrees, and I took out my student loans. I have student loans coming out of my... But you know, that was how you made money as a teacher. You got more degrees and you made your money. And so I did those things, and now, you know, it's just, we feel disappointed.

Amy believed that the American Dream—the notion that hard work and playing by the rules would yield just rewards—had not materialized for her family.

Housing Insecurity

Economic unpredictability was also manifested with respect to housing. Several participants recounted uncertainty they faced regarding their ability to sell their primary or secondary residences. Manny, 37 (a construction worker whose wife is a teacher and who described their economic status as "pretty good"), said that he and his wife wanted to move to a neighboring community where his wife works and his children attend school, but they did not know how mobility would be possible in the current economic climate. As Manny explained, "I owe too much on [my house] right now. I don't really think that I'm upside down on it, but I couldn't get out of it what I have [put] in to it." Amy, 34, said that she would love to move in order to find better employment opportunities for her husband and herself, but that she felt confined by the current housing market and did not know how moving would be possible. As Amy explained, "We have a house here that's losing value like crazy, and we can't sell it and get back what we owe, so we're kind of just stuck here." Gary, 62 (retired, married to a teacher, who described their economic status as "comfortable, not as comfortable as we were at the end of 2007, but you know, we're not going to starve"), and his wife bought a house to renovate and sell as an investment before the economic downturn. The expense of owning two homes had delayed his wife's retirement and they were uncertain when they would be able to sell the investment property, due to the depressed housing market. Similarly, Hilda, 40, who described her financial status as "so broke I can't even pay attention" (she and her partner are both self-employed in the food industry), was unsure how she was going to sell her second home in another town. As she explained, "The housing market right now is pretty bad. And the person who wants to buy it wants to offer much less than I previously had in mind."

Other participants, who also owned rental properties, were uncertain about how to make ends meet when tenants were unable to pay the rent. For example, as Heather, 46 (a homemaker mother and substitute teacher whose husband works at a correctional facility and is retired from the military, and who described their status as "stabilizing"), explained:

> We have two houses, but we're probably going to lose one this month. It's just…the times. [My husband] has a big heart. We let a guy move into it; he stopped paying, I took him to court…the guy paid for a little while after we took

> him to court, but he stopped paying again. He hasn't paid the taxes; he hasn't paid anything. And we're probably going to lose our house because now that the recession has hit the value of the house is just a whole lot less than it was before.

Because the housing market was so unpredictable, participants were unsure how they could go about selling their house, moving to a more desirable location, or renting their properties. Part of this uncertainty was due to the unusual state of the economy—in previous years, housing had been viewed as a sound investment (Streitfeld, 2010); however, at the time of the study, participants were experiencing the declining home values and paucity of buyers that accompanied the recent economic downturn.

General Economic Insecurity

Extending beyond fears of joblessness and a stagnant housing market, a sense of general economic unpredictability resulted in uncertainty for many participants, particularly those who were accustomed to financial stability and felt blindsided by the recession. Participants reflected a sense that no one was immune from the recession's effects, regardless of income or occupation. As Mike, 49 (an executive at a local bank whose wife is a homemaker and who described their economic status as middle class), explained:

> You know, I make a good living [but] you just never know what's around the corner anymore. You know, you try to plan, you try to make sure… [but] you don't have control over the value of your home, you don't control the value of your assets. So it's really kind of screwy. It's a different mindset; it really is. It stresses a lot of people, obviously.

Participants described a new post-recession economic reality, in which nothing was certain and stress was high for many. As Fuerza, 63 (a bank manager whose husband is retired and who described their financial status as "ok; I mean we're not struggling or anything like that"), explained, "Like I tell all these young girls that I work with, 'I've been in your shoes where you're struggling from check to check.' Luckily, thank God, I'm not there anymore. I could easily go there I guess—you never know." Financial stability was no longer guaranteed.

Faced with an unpredictable economy and uncertain salary, Amy, 34, a teacher, spoke to the helplessness felt by many participants when she explained that she felt "trapped":

> I really want to do something different and because I have the health insurance and the main money, I can't quit, so I feel really trapped right now…. I'm just so worried about, you know, what's going to happen with the public schools and how I'm going to make ends meet, and what's going to happen if I get laid off, or what happens if [my husband] gets laid off. 'Cause the college is privatizing food service, and he's kind of in that contract because he's grounds, so we are worried…he might lose his job. So we both feel like our jobs are pretty tenuous and there's not a lot of options.

Steve's hands were also tied. Steve, 68 (a restaurant owner whose wife is a retired speech pathologist and who described their status as middle class), explained that his business (and thus his livelihood) was "totally dependent on the economy….and when things are going bad, it becomes very, very tough. So the economy in direct relationship to my business and to my lifestyle; it's always a constant burden." Donna, 63 (who works for city, whose husband owns an auto repair shop and who described their status as "not very good"), discussed the struggles she and her husband have faced with his auto repair business as people have delayed or stopped fixing their cars because of the economy: "It's been real rough…we're falling behind." She went on to say that, "Everybody's feeling the same pinch, especially in [the state], but I feel like we're quickly losing ground."

Part of this uncertainty arose from participants sensing they were barely making ends meet and not knowing what they would do if they were to become even more adversely affected by the economy. For example, Cindy, 48 (a grants manager married to a college professor who described their economic status as middle class), said she was most worried about not having a "cushion, something if one of us lost our job or you know as we do get closer to retiring, just making sure we have enough to, you know, to be fine." Ambiguity about not having a nest egg or back-up plan made the uncertain economic climate even more threatening.

PERSONAL UNCERTAINTY

Many participants also experienced personal uncertainty—ambiguity about their financial future and whether they would be able to save enough money for various essential forthcoming needs, including retirement, education, and medical expenses. Personal uncertainty was also manifested with respect to internal ambiguity surrounding participants' beliefs and identity with respect to finances.

Retirement Planning

Retirement planning emerged as a major source of uncertainty, particularly among participants of all income levels who were at or approaching retirement age. Participants' widespread uncertainty surrounding retirement is not surprising, given that retirement has repeatedly surfaced as Americans' top financial concern. People rank retirement worries ahead of 15 other financial fears, including uninsured medical expenses, the price of gas, and increasing education costs (American Institute of CPA's Harris Interactive Survey, 2011). Wealthier participants in the current study worried that their retirement plans had been derailed by the economic downturn or that they could potentially outlive their resources, while less affluent participants were concerned that they had neglected retirement saving over the years and were unsure how to act.

Despite years of careful planning, Jack, 68 (a retired hospital administrator married to a retired occupational therapist who described their financial status as “very comfortable”), was uncertain about “the value of our investments that we put aside for—well, more than 40 years.” After four decades of investing and believing that he and his wife were financially prepared for retirement, the economic downturn and resulting stock market crash caused him to worry about whether they would have enough money to live on, especially if the economy were to worsen. Jack said that he and his wife worried about what they were going to do if “the world goes to hell in a handbag.” Gary, 62, was uncertain about how he and his wife would be able to afford for her to retire in light of their declining portfolio and home values. She had been planning on quitting her job but needed to keep working in order to support the family and offset their investment losses. “I’ve been hoping that dividends will pick up, and maybe there will star to be a rebound in housing value,” Gary explained, “So far none of that has happened. It’s been a very strange recovery.” Participants such as Jack and Gary had assumed that their investments would yield sufficient retirement income for them to live comfortable lives, but as a result of the economic downturn were unsure if they would have the money they needed. They were uncertain about how to compensate for these recent financial losses.

Indeed, the largest source of retirement uncertainty reflected by participants was whether they and their partner would outlive their resources, particularly if they were concerned that they had not started saving early enough. Even though Edward, 71 (both he and wife are retired), described their financial status as “pretty well set,” he acknowledged that he was “a little concerned that our retirement will run out before we die, especially as they say now longevity may go to 90 or something like that. My mother was three weeks short of 91 when she died." Similarly, as Bob, 63 (a city administrator whose wife is a retired teacher who works part time in a store and described their status as "pretty comfortable right now"), explained, "If I knew I was going to live to be 83, I'd be pretty comfortable I've got enough money to get there. If I live till I'm 100 that might be a problem." Because participants were unable to discern both the likelihood of outliving their investments (as they could not predict their death) and the performance of their investments (as they could not control the financial markets), they lacked information and were unsure how to best prepare.

Uncertainty about outliving resources was particularly salient if participants worried that unexpected expenses could materialize, because there was simply no way of knowing whether they would be faced with costs that could diminish their retirement savings. Pauleen, 69 (who works in health care outreach, whose husband is disabled retired from a factory, and who described their financial status as "sound, I think"), said she was worried that she would not have enough money to cover her expenses once she retired in the coming months. Although she had amassed $30,000 in savings that would enable her to pay off her mortgage, she was concerned that those funds might not be enough to supplement her retirement. "You know," Pauleen said, "Anything could happen; a catastrophe of any kind could happen." She was uncertain whether she would be able to afford unexpected expenses with her current savings and if she would be able to locate employment if she needed to reenter the workforce in order to earn extra money. As she explained:

> I think I worry, period. Because with the economy, I just worry about…I have never ever had to live when I wasn't working. And so I worry about the light bill, the gas bill, and I never worked on a budget 'cause I always had enough money to

> take care of everything. I'm worried about my car breaking down or something happening at the house, replacing a furnace or replacing this, or you have a water spill. And I'm worried about those things that could take a big chunk out of that little money that I got to cover my house. And I am worried about that. I'm truly worried about that. And I keep…after I made the decision that I was going to leave, I was kind of like, I keep questioning. And I say to my brother, "What if I need to find a job? Will I be able to find a part-time job? You know, will somebody hire me at my age?" Because he was the same way. He lost his job and he had to retire early, and so he had a big, big, he's got a big mortgage, and I worry about all those things. And my car's paid for, so I'm thinking if I have to buy a car will I be able to make these…cause I'm bound and determined I'm not going to pay the house off; I want that money for the what ifs. So if I have to buy a car am I going to be able to buy my insurance? All of those little things that I started putting into a spreadsheet and wondering, well, we will have enough income but we'll just be living on the edge, and I don't like that….And I keep saying [to my husband], "Well, our lifestyles are really going to change. Are we going to be able to do this? We gotta make sure we cut expenses. We gotta figure out a way to cut expenses…" So I do worry about that.

Because Pauleen lacked information about what her retirement expenses would entail, she was incredibly uncertain about facing the post-retirement unknowns.

Some participants expressed serious concerns about their ability to comfortably retire because they had not saved enough money. As Joe, 64, explained, "Well, now that we are knocking on the door of retirement I wish we had started talking about retirement when we were 20. I wish we had gotten more serious about that." Joe regretted not planning for retirement sooner, so that they he and his wife could have potentially amassed more savings. For participants such as Donna, 63, retirement seemed like a distant and unattainable goal. She was uncertain how she and her husband were going to generate enough money to retire because they were barely bringing in enough money to make ends meet, let alone save, and they could no longer depend on their original retirement strategy. They had planned to sell their auto repair business and building and use that money as their retirement income, but had been unable to find a buyer at a time in which real estate values had declined and buyers were scarce. Meanwhile, her husband was 70 and still working, struggling to repair cars that required more technical and computer expertise than he could confidently provide.

Even participants who were several years away from retirement were uncertain about their ability to afford to comfortably retire. Patty, 42 (who works part time at the library and part time cleaning at night, and whose partner works part time in a factory and described their status as stable), was uncertain about how she was going to get by when she was no longer working:

> I haven't really planned very well for the future. And I guess because I've always been really young and energetic and stuff, I've never really thought about a day when I won't be working and I really need to think seriously about that…because I do realize that someday, especially, I think, seeing my dad [who has Lou Gehrig's Disease; ALS] made me face my own mortality, you know what I mean?... 'Cause my dad had always been a worker and to see him so feeble right now is a hard pill to swallow.

Patty was concerned about how she was going to provide for herself and her family when she aged. She had always planned on working, but her father's illness made her realize that life and health were unpredictable. Similarly, Ellen, 48, reported that retirement was "probably what I worry about the most…it's going to be here sooner than we think. And then what? Are we going to have enough? Do we have plans in place now that we're going to be comfortable?"

Heather, 46, was a notable exception—she worried not that her family was saving too little for retirement but that they were saving too much. She was concerned that her husband was over-saving at the expense of their daily needs. As Heather explained:

> I felt that he was putting way too much into his retirement. He had this idea that he was going to retire a millionaire or something, so he was putting all this money into it, and I really felt that at the time we needed that money for the kids' college and for home repairs, and I felt like he was robbing us of money we needed now to set something up.

Because she did not have legal control of her husband's account, Heather was unable to reduce his contribution and was uncertain how to convince her husband to invest less to better provide for the family's more immediate needs.

Investment Planning

Compounding the challenge of how to save enough money for retirement was the reality that many participants reported a lack an understanding of investments. As Donna, 63, explained:

> I just don't understand [investments]. I have stocks and things like that, and I'll read over something that comes in the mail. I'll hand it over to [my husband] and say, "Okay, you read that!" and we're staring at each other afterwards thinking, "Okay, what's this mean?"

As Kathy, 57, put it, "I don't understand stocks…I am not a financial-type person, you know?...I don't like math of any kind." Amy, 34, said that although she and her husband had established savings accounts for their children, they did not know how to invest money or where to turn for help. Jeremiah, 42 (a factory worker whose wife is between jobs and described their status as stable), mentioned feeling uncertain about how to invest his retirement funds. Before the economic downturn, he said, "I had it kind of aggressive and in different accounts. But now I got everything in a guaranteed account. You get low percentage on your return, but I just lost money so I just put it in a guaranteed." He was uncertain whether that was the best approach.

Participants' uncertainty about investments is not surprising given the complexity of the financial markets, overwhelming investment options (Elliott, 2012; Wilcox, 2009), and the lack of information people receive about how and where to save, particularly when faced with the worst economy since the Great Depression (Gould-Werth & Burgard, 2012). These challenges are compounded by the reality that more and more people are in charge of managing their own retirement accounts versus relying on a pension (Karp, 2012).

Debt-Repayment Planning

Ambiguity about how to reduce or pay off debt (from credit cards, health-related expenses, and student loans) surfaced as another source of personal uncertainty. April, 36, said that a large source of contention for her and her husband in the first half of their marriage was how they were going to reduce their debt. As she explained, "I was pissed that he had so much debt, and I was mad that I had so much debt, and then I was angry that we both had these really good jobs and we still only had this much leftover." Jane, 36 (a graduate student whose partner is a professor at the local college and who described their status as middle class), talked about the uncertainty she faced in thinking about how she was going to repay the roughly $1,000 in monthly loan payments she will have incurred from her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees. "Once I get that notice, like, 'You gotta start paying your loans back,' I'm going to have a heart attack," Jane said. Additionally, Lee, 36 (an independent contractor whose wife is a teacher and described their financial status as "not good"), described the struggles he and his wife faced in "digging our way out of the hole that was created by both of us attending college and master's programs." Coupled with the expense of their two young children, they were unsure how to manage their college debt.

Education Planning

Several participants spoke of worries about how they were going to be able to afford their children's higher education. Mike, 49, reflected the concerns of many participants whose children's college was on the horizon when he asked, "Where are we gonna get the $80-100,000?" Cindy, 48, described a fear of not "hav[ing] enough money to send the kids to college…cause we don't have; I mean we do have an account, a fund for their college, but it's not, considering how much it costs to go to school now…going to go very far." Similarly, Heidi, 39 (who works in city management and whose husband is a general laborer and who described their financial status as middle class), said she was also concerned about how they were going to pay for their children's tuition. As Heidi explained:

> The cost of college just scares the heck out of me. We'll make sure that they have to go. It's just the fact of, okay, how are we going to make the loan payments? How are we going to…you know, because we've promised each of them that we will pay for a two-year degree. And anything beyond that, they should be able to have their two-year degree, be able to work and pay towards it themselves. It's just…I'll get one out and then the other one next because they're three years

> apart. So if I pay for a two-year degree for each one of them for the next six years, eight years I'll be paying on college loans.

Additionally, Charmaine, 45 (who works for the library, whose husband works in manufacturing and who described their economic status as newly middle class), expressed uncertainty about how she and her husband were going to be able to send their children to college. She said that she worried:

> We're not going to have the money that our kids need to go to school, you know? And I know that there's loans, but I want to be able for them to go without having to go into debt big time, and I don't…that worries me…because I want them to go and I don't want them to not go because they think we can't afford it.

Further, Heather, 46, and her husband had one son in college (and another quickly nearing college age). She said she was constantly uncertain about how they were going to continue paying their share of his tuition.

> If I had to say to [my son in college], "I made stupid decisions and I just can't pay that $40,000 a year in tuition…" I mean, he's got scholarships—grants and everything—but I mean my portion of it, my $178 a month that I have to pay toward his tuition. It would just crush me to say that I made such bad decisions that you can't become a petroleum engineer.

As Heather explained, "I want to kinda turn things around a little bit so I can make [my children's] dreams come true…What worries me most is not being able to help them." Participant concerns about generating the funds to send their children to college were exacerbated by the fact that participants did not have much, if any, money to spare and they lacked knowledge of how to cut back to save for college. At the same time, participants who were struggling financially realized that in order for their children to get ahead in life and become economically stable, they needed a college degree. This double bind likely intensified participants' uncertainty.

Medical Planning

Medical and health planning concerns emerged as another considerable source of uncertainty. Participants were especially worried about paying for health care costs and making health care decisions. The uncertainty stemmed from participants' inability to predict whether and when they or their partner would fall ill as well as the severity and expense of a future illness.

Kathy, 57, said that she was uncertain about how she and her husband were going to manage if one of them had "bad health issues and that there won't be enough [money] to take care of us the remainder of our years." As she explained:

> I watched my grandmother go through a similar thing with herself. My grandfather had died probably 20 years prior to my grandmother's death, and so I saw how much trouble she had taking care of herself when she started getting ill, and not having enough money for her meds…

Kathy was concerned that she and her husband would also struggle to pay for their health care if they fell ill. Kelly, 32, also faced uncertainty regarding health care costs—she and her partner were trying to have a baby via a sperm donor, and they were unsure how to pay for the monthly sperm injections. Medical uncertainty also involved making important healthcare decisions. For instance, Ellen, 48, described uncertainty regarding determining which of three available health care plans to enroll their family in: "the Cadillac, the middle version, and the cheap version." Making the wrong choice could affect their family's treatment options and out-of-pocket costs.

Beliefs

Another type of personal uncertainty that surfaced involves uncertainty about beliefs, an internal sense of ambiguity about how participants should spend and save money. Reflecting a cultural tension between spending money for today or saving for a rainy day, many participants talked about the uncertainty they experienced about whether they should be spending or saving money, particularly during an unstable economy. Edward, 71, said that he was more hesitant to spend money on travel, which he and his wife enjoyed, because he was uncertain about having enough money for retirement. On the other hand, as much as Pauleen, 69, worried that she might not have enough money to live comfortably after she retired, she wanted to enjoy her money in the moment, while she was still healthy. As she explained, in order to plan for retirement she should:

> Act like my work funds, that I don't have them. I just haven't been able to do that…I keep thinking, "Yeah, but if something happens to me, somebody else is going to enjoy it." Then I think I need to enjoy it, so that's the way I rationalize it. It's not a good methodology; I would not recommend it because I don't think it's smart.

Pauleen acknowledged that her strategy was flawed with respect to long-term financial planning, but that she had a difficult time sacrificing the lifestyle she had grown accustomed to and enjoyed, particularly since the future was so uncertain. She did not want to force herself to completely downsize her lifestyle only to risk dying young. Similarly, April, 36, faced considerable uncertainty both about whether she should quit her job and stay home with her six children and whether she should delay paying bills and "rob Peter to pay Paul" in order to provide the family with recreational opportunities, such as vacations. Like Pauleen, April was torn between being financially prudent and living for today.

Additionally, Amy, 34, spoke of the uncertainty she and her husband faced in trying to figure out ways to save money while still enjoying life:

> We have to do a better job—both of us—of tightening our belts and not spending as easily. We don't buy a lot of things, but we have things we like, you know? Like he likes to go to concerts, and I like to buy the kids clothes. We like to go out to eat. So we know we need to cut back on most things, and we have tried. We've done it a little bit, but I don't think we've done it as successfully as we could have and need to and will.

Amy was aware that they needed to save more, but was unsure how to accomplish this goal, in part because she did not want to deprive herself or her husband of what they enjoyed. Similarly, although Francine, 43 (a homemaker and student whose husband is self-employed and described their financial status as "very low income"), said that she and her husband struggled to pay bills, relied on government assistance, and never knew when they were going to have money coming in, they tried to enjoy life when they could versus saving for the future. As she explained, "Usually if we have good month, then after we pay everything we usually try to do something together as a family. 'Cause…you can't take it with you when you die." Indeed, Charmaine, 45, reported that she and her husband constantly struggled to negotiate their wants and needs. Even when times were particularly challenging, they still bought "things that we really didn't have to have that we really wanted and got anyway" and were uncertain how to balance wanting nice items with the reality that these purchases could come at the cost of their financial security.

Participants and partners who grew up in low-income families faced particularly salient uncertainty about how to handle the tension between saving and spending. As

Lori, 57 (who is self-employed, whose partner works three part-time jobs, and who described their financial status as "tight"), explained:

> Well, we both grew up poor, so we tend to look at, anytime we get money, it's like, "Oh, wow, we have this great wonderful thing; let's go do something!" And that's part of where we run into trouble. It's like, um, we're getting a little better at hanging on to what we need to, but it's still hard to say no.

Because some participants grew up in an underprivileged family background and were unable to purchase items when they were children, they desired them now, consistent with previous research (e.g., Schor, 1998). Indeed, another reason Pauleen, 69, said she was reluctant to cut back was because of the value she placed on nice things. Growing up low-income, to her, purchases symbolized achievement and "restrictions" would make her feel like she was poor again. She still wanted to feel successful during retirement, and she was uncertain how she could change her mindset and face the retirement reality that she was going to have to reduce spending to pay for the unknowns. As Pauleen explained:

> I come from a poor family. When I was coming up, we were poor, extremely poor. And we were a large family—there were seven kids in our family. And…my mom was a stay-at-home mom and I can remember not having shoes—you know, [having] hand-me-down shoes to wear. My mom made my school clothes out of flour sacks. And I worry about that. And you know, now I love clothes and I buy kind of expensive clothes, and you know, I think that all of that's going to be taken away from me and how am I going to adjust to that? Because I think I will feel like I'm back when I was younger, in my high school years, and that scares me…what if they cut my Social Security? What if they

> cut my pension? What am I going to do…I'm just uptight about it, truthfully, really uptight about thinking about it.

As Pauleen illustrated, uncertainty about whether to spend or save not only involved learning how to cut back, but figuring out a way to come to terms with these reductions without feeling deprived.

Identity

Several participants experienced personal uncertainty regarding their or their partners' ability to maintain a desired financial role or identity. For example, several males described themselves as providers for their families and worried that economic forces outside of their control could compromise this role and the traditional notion of males as breadwinners (e.g., Prince, 1993). Tom, 62 (retired, whose wife works full time for the college and who described their financial status "as not wanting for anything"), said he was worried about his ability to provide for his family:

> I wanna make sure that if something occurs we can cover it…I wanna make sure that the family's going to be okay, that the family survives. I am not worried about me anymore; before I met [my wife] it was all about me, but it is not about me, not anymore, it is about us—we and the family.

The unpredictable financial times made Tom concerned about his ability to always provide.

Lee, 36, who works as an independent contractor, was also uncertain about his role as a provider. Although he said he tried hard to earn a good living, he acknowledged that he was neither generating a sizeable income nor spending enough time with his children, which caused him to be unsure of his identity and position within his family:

I don’t have stable income. And the amount that I have is so, so small. I think less than the income thing it’s how much time and energy that I’m putting into what I’m doing and the fact that it’s not providing a whole lot. Like, I can literally go flip burgers and probably make more money and have more time at home than the job I’m doing right now. And it does suck because there’s this whole potential and I know there’s potential because like I said, I made $1,600 a week back in December and unfortunately we’re not there yet, and so it’s something that very much puts a lot of stress on me because I’m the one doing the work, but it also puts a lot of stress and strain on my wife because when I come home she doesn’t know how much I’ve made. And she knows that I’ve been away for…I wasn’t able to come home and put the kids to bed because I get home so late, and all these other things, and I think, you know, she’s definitely the kind of person where it’s not about the money as much as it’s about, “I just want you home to help take care of the kids.” And for me, I’m just as upset about the fact that I can’t be home to take care of the kids. The fact that I only see them for two hours in the morning before I drop them off at daycare—that tears me up. And for me, I’m fine with making a small amount of money, but at least let me have the other things that I’m missing out on. I’m getting hit on both ends. And I’ve always been the type of person where I’m a firm workers’ rights person, and it feels like I’m not being valued at work, and it also feels like when I come home I’m not being valued either. Because I don’t bring any money to the table, and I’m not able to be there to help take care of my kids, and you know I think there’s this animosity that you can just kind of feel. I just feel like my wife kind of—doesn’t necessarily look down on me, but she doesn’t…it’s not even—respect isn’t the right word either. It just feels like she doesn’t appreciate the work because the

> whole money aspect overshadows that. She's happy that I'm back to work—yay! I was unemployed for six months. She's happy that I'm back to work, but man, much greater than that she's upset that I'm not able to provide all these other things.

Because Lee did not serve as his family's primary breadwinner and was also unable to take a more active role with his children, he questioned his worth and value as a person. He felt as though he was letting himself and his wife down:

> We look at people who make money and we equate that with some level of success, with some level of status and achievement. Let's not even talk about the reverse of that. We look at people who don't have money and we demonize them, and it's all their fault. That whole Horatio Alger concept of, you know, "My goodness, you can't pull yourself up? What's wrong with you?" And then it becomes something that's not just monetary. It's actually placing the value on the person. "Well, clearly if you don't make any money, there must be something wrong with you. This is America; this is capitalism at its finest, where anyone can make money, and why can't you? What is wrong with you?" And even though we're kind of experiencing a middle-class symptom of that within our family structure, I do kind of feel that. I know it's nothing that is direct. My wife would never come out and say that. But I get the sense that somewhere deep down inside there's a little animosity, you know? And I'm sure that there's some personal that I want to put on myself as well because I want to contribute. Who doesn't want to contribute?

Likely compounding these pressures was Lee's sex. Because he is a man his wife may have implicitly expected greater financial contributions.

Indeed, reflecting the traditional male-as-breadwinner gender role (e.g., Prince, 1993), Charmaine, 45 and Francine, 43, who were both financially struggling, speculated about how difficult it must be for their husbands to struggle to provide for their family. As Charmaine explained:

> I mean, you can only do what you can do and it's hard when you don't have what you need to take care of your household. You know, I can only say what it makes me feel like. I can only imagine him being a man. You know, he's supposed to take care of family.

Francine said it upset her husband that the family was so short of money that he could only afford to buy her flowers once a year, with their tax refund. While she stated that she would also like to have the money to buy her husband a gift, such as a watch, she believed her husband took their financial hardship more personally. "I think it's hard for him, just because he is the man, you know, and being the man of the house, you're supposed to be, you know, responsible for your household and the bills, and the kids, your spouse."

In fact, Heidi, 39, reported that a major source of financial uncertainty for her was telling her husband that after two years of working she received a raise that made her income equivalent to what he had been earning after 19 years at his job. As she explained, "He comes from a very old-fashioned family where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the house maker and this and that. I didn't want to injure his mind, you know?" Despite Heidi's worry and the traditional gender roles expressed by many participants, Heidi's husband was receptive to her increased earnings. She reported that he said, "Good; if you keep going like this I can finally retire early."

FAMILY UNCERTAINTY

Family uncertainty emerged as another source of ambiguity for participants. It involves uncertainty pertaining to partners' or extended family members' money management.

Partner

Several participants recounted a sense of uncertainty about their partner's financial decisions and the effect they had on the family's well-being. For example, Heather, 46, faced considerable uncertainty regarding her husband's financial management. She said that her husband, who suffers from attention deficit disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder, would lose or misplace money and was often scared to spend money, even on necessary home repairs. As Heather explained, "his stress level….the sky is falling…it's just so severe at times." Despite his fear of spending money, he would sometimes act recklessly, spending lavishly on purchases and, after his sister died, quitting his job without first consulting Heather. During the six-month period in which he was unemployed, Heather explained, "We were just like, living hand to mouth." A few participants also worried about the ways in which their partners paid bills. For example, Manny, 37, reported uncertainty about whether his wife, who handled bill paying, was going to pay credit card bills on time. Ironically, he said that since he and his wife started earning more money and became more financially stable, his wife became less concerned about finances and had "gotten in the habit of paying [bills] late," which adversely affected his credit rating and increased his frustration:

> That's one thing I've always prided myself on was having an excellent credit score. I've always been able to walk in and I've never put money down on a car or anything. I've always been able to sign on a paper and walk out with whatever

> I want. Now it's getting harder to do that, and it's a little bit frustrating for me to not have the Tier 1.

Manny said that "now that our finances, financial situation is better, we don't watch our money the way we should." Manny's wife's bill paying became erratic and unpredictable, which caused him considerable uncertainty, uncertainty he did not experience when money was tighter and they were more careful. As he put it, "That's why I say sometimes having money isn't everything." Similar to the finding that improvements in health can sometimes cause uncertainty that can be negatively appraised (Brashers et al., 1999), Manny reflected a sense that being more financially stable can result in an assessment of aversive uncertainty because of the accompanying stressors.

Other participants experienced uncertainty about their partners' spendthrift ways. For example, although Charmaine, 45, acknowledged that both she and her husband enjoyed finer things, their "toys" (she admitted a particular fondness for shoes), her husband once went behind her back and bought a new car after they had decided not to purchase it. Charmaine said she was left having to figure out how to financially and personally negotiate his betrayal. Megan, 33, owns an online business and her partner is unemployed. She described their status as "pretty good. I'm not suffering right now… Basically, my motto is if you ain't got bills due and your rent's paid and you got food in your house, things like that, then you're pretty good." Megan experienced uncertainty about whether her partner was going to increase his contributions to the family. He spent most of his days gambling with friends, leaving her to pay the majority of the expenses and manage the household finances. Mike, 49, experienced ambiguity about whether (and how much) his wife was going to spend on the credit card. This disrupted his budgeting for the month and made it more difficult for him to plan. As Mike explained:

> I try to get her to stop doing that because that's not the way I want to be able to manage our funds. I mean, if I'm paying the bills I don't want her charging things when there's money on the debit card to charge.

Because Mike never knew how much his wife charged until he received the monthly statements, his budget was disrupted.

Partner uncertainty also involved worries by some participants who managed the family's finances that their partner did not possess adequate knowledge of family finances if something were to happen to the participant. Bob, 63, said that he would like his wife to be more involved in financial management so that "If I died tomorrow she'd have an idea what she had to do every day." He proceeded to say:

> I think we should spend more time with her periodic[ly] looking at the monthly bills and what we do with the accounts just so she's more familiar with it. I've got it all set up downstairs, so she could spend a few hours figuring everything out.

Bob speculated that his wife did not have the time or desire to learn. Earlier in their marriage, when they were short of money at the end of the month and she was upset, he said he offered to turn over the financial management to her but she had no interest. It is possible that she did not want to take on the worry involved in managing the books. Heidi, 39, also said she would like her partner to be more involved in paying bills because she was uncertain about what would happen with their finances if "something ever happened to me where I ended up having to have surgery or be in the hospital or something." She wanted him to be able to manage the daily needs in case of an emergency. Similarly, Maureen, 59, said that she wanted her husband to "take a little more active role in the investing and things," because she was unsure how he would manage the finances if something were to happen to her. She described a typical conversation as follows:

Maureen: “Would you like to go to the financial advisor’s? Do you want to go to the bank? Do you know you have this many thousands of dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars in an account at this bank and that bank and…?”

Husband: “No.”

Maureen: “What are you going to do if something happens to me?”

Husband: “Oh, I don’t know; I’ll find it. Wait for the monthly statements.”

Maureen said that, like many partners who were not in charge of financial management, her husband was more than happy not to have to worry about money and investments.

Extended Family

Another form of family uncertainty surfaced among participants who were unsure of the ways in which extended family members would handle finances. This external uncertainty was a cause of concern for a few participants. For example, both Maureen, 59, and Ellen, 48, were uncertain about a possible fallout with their siblings following the settlement of their parents’ estates. Maureen said that she was concerned about having to support her financially-irresponsible brother if he spent all of their mother’s inheritance. As she explained, “I’m afraid he’ll burn through his share of my mother’s estate inside of two or three years and be knocking on my door and I’ll have to say no.” Ellen also expressed uncertainty concerning future interactions with her sister after her parents pass away ,“as far as who gets left what” because her sister has been financially supported by her parents for a “long, long time” and Ellen’s husband believed she had already received most of her inheritance. As Ellen explained, “When that comes time to talk about that, that’s going to be tense because…it’s gonna raise issues with me, family-related that are out of my control.” Because issues pertaining to estates were out of participants’ control, participants were uncertain as they were unable to predict how family members would react and how these interactions would transpire.

Additionally, although she had a will, Pauleen, 69, expressed uncertainty that, after her death, her children would not receive an inheritance, as she had directed, but that her husband's family would gain control of her money. Because she had heard of improper execution of people's wills, she was unsure whether her money would go to her children. As she explained:

> I believe that if something happens to me, my husband would take whatever resources we have and his family would negatively influence him and our children would be left out. And what I've got I want my children to have…I want our children, I want them to benefit from our resources. I don't think that would happen. I think [my husband's family would] talk him into buying like the fancy new Cadillac car even if he couldn't afford it…. And I think, I just believe that would happen…I've seen people with wills but they aren't carried out.

COMMUNICATION UNCERTAINTY

A further source of financial uncertainty involved participants' sense of not knowing how to interact with partners about finances (e.g., convince partners to spend less, save more, pay a larger portion of bills, talk about money) without these conversations resulting in arguments and conflict. Indeed, uncertainty regarding communication emerged as another type of ambiguity. Amy, 34, articulated the opinions of several participants when she said, "I don't want to have to fight about money. I really don't, and I've always appreciated that we didn't have to." However, with financial uncertainty high for many, participants were worried that in order to make financial decisions, they would have to talk with their spouse, which could result in conflict. Lee, 36, said that he would like to "be able to talk about financial planning as far as future, our retirement, as far as our kids" with his wife, but that he did not know how to engage in productive money conversations with her. As he explained:

> A lot of times if I bring something up it feels like it gets shot down or she just doesn't want to hear about it, doesn't want to deal with it, you know? We actually, even general conversations, we just don't have a lot of general conversations. We just don't talk about things, which is really unusual to me because I'm not used to that. And I don't know how we got to where we are. I don't know. I think to some extent, I thought that she would open up more as we progressed in our relationship, kind of very similar to how I think that she felt that I would start working my way up that pay ladder. So I think because of that, both of us haven't seen the other person kind of bloom as much as we expected. It's just that you kind of get defeated and you kind of stop putting the effort into it.

Lee said that this lack of communication, coupled with high uncertainty about how to communicate without conversations escalating into arguments, was worse than the fact that they were struggling financially. As he explained, the communication barrier was "more of a significant problem than the fact that I'm only making $20,000 a year, you know. And I think she would probably agree." Similarly, Claire, 25 (a librarian whose partner is a mechanic and who described their status as middle class), said that she worried about her partner's spending but did not know how to discuss it in a way that would prompt him to change his behavior. As she explained, they had completely different approaches to spending and saving money:

> Money burns a hole in his pocket, basically. When he gets paid he needs to spend it. He doesn't [save]…I save it right away; he wants to go buy new running

> shoes that he doesn't need or new tools…or something. He just likes to spend. I don't know. I don't do that. I only buy things if I have to or I try to see if I really want something to make sure I can afford it.

Claire reported that her and her partner's divergent money management perspectives were a considerable source of conflict. Because she did not know how to effectively talk with her partner about reducing his spending, she experienced communication uncertainty. Many participants reported that communication with their partners was particularly contentious "during the lean years." As Kathy, 57, explained, "When money's bad, the arguments ensue, I do know that." The anxiety of living paycheck to paycheck was coupled with uncertainty about how to talk with their partners about meeting their family's basic needs.

CHRONIC UNCERTAINTY

Several participants were so worried about how they were going to make ends meet that the aforementioned types of financial uncertainty (such as retirement or investment planning) were not salient for them. These participants were continually focused on the day-to-day and not projecting into the future. For example, when asked about saving for retirement, Megan, 33, said, "I ain't even got that far." She said she was too busy figuring out how to live day-to-day and generate enough money to meet her family's basic needs. Several low-income participants such as Megan experienced chronic uncertainty—ongoing uncertainty about how to get by and meet their basic needs. For these participants, similar to the chronically ill (Mishel, 1990) and chronically job insecure (e.g., Heaney et al., 1994), uncertainty had been a fixture of their lives for several years. These participants experienced financial struggles long before the recession, and were frequently eligible for such government assistance as Food Stamps.

For chronically-uncertain participants, uncertainty had become an indelible part of life, similar to the ambiguity faced by people suffering from chronic illnesses (see Mishel, 1990).

For instance, Martin, 55 (who works part time as a groundskeeper but has struggled to find stable employment; his fiancé was recently laid off from her factory job), described his financial status as poor and relied on social services to survive. He said he was unsure how he was going to pay the bills every month. Indeed, several of the chronically-uncertain participants had little to no control over their incomes. As Megan, 33, explained, "I live basically paycheck to paycheck and I never know what I'm making until I go and get my work and see what I gotta do." Similarly, Lori, 57, stated, "We don't really know from one day to the next how much [money] is really going to come in." Lori's uncertainty stemmed from "trying to find enough to go around" and figuring out how to stay afloat. As she explained:

> My income tends to be fluid. You don't always know what's coming in or when or anything, so it's a nice little surprise when it does 'cause then we can be like, "Oh, great; I got 20 bucks, let's pay this." Or if things are tight then I start wondering, "Well, where's the money gonna come from?" And there's not much [my partner] can do about that. I mean she only makes so much and you know this is it. So trying to figure out how to work that.

Just as Megan and Lori were unaware how much money they had available on any given day, other participants shared similar daily challenges. For example, Hilda, 40, and her partner had been unemployed for months and were in the process of trying to open a café at the time of the study. Hilda said they were uncertain about "how to get money, how to make money, and what's the best way to make money." She worried "Am I going to be able to support my family? And am I going to be able to [have] a successful business?

Am I going to be able to run the business as I would like to?" She said that money concerns were constantly in the back of her mind: "Oh my God, what am I going to do? And you cannot be as happy and free if you have something that clutches your heart…" Francine, 43, recounted the uncertainty she faced with respect to how she was going to generate money to pay bills and buy groceries without accruing even more debt. Hilda said it was never clear whether she and her husband would have a good or bad month with their business, as "there's some months where we have no income at all." Uncertainty about paying bills and paying debt was "just always there," Francine stated, as she and her husband had struggled for so long.

Similarly, Kim, 26 (a homemaker whose husband works in a factory and described their financial status as "pretty good" after her husband resumed work following two years of unemployment), discussed several sources of chronic uncertainty she faced in trying to make ends meet. Although her husband's income was consistent, she said that she was constantly unsure how they were going to pay the bills, as "you never know month-to-month what your electric or gas is gonna be." Her most salient uncertainty was whether the family was going to have enough money for groceries at certain times of the month because "there's only like one to two weeks a month that we don't have everything due at the same time." Kim said that finding the money to pay for her children's needs was particularly tricky because of the unanticipated expenses involved in raising kids. As she explained:

> We never know, from week to week, month to month, if we're going to need extra Pull-Ups or extra diapers, 'cause you never know when they're going to get sick or if they're going to have…eat something that's not going to set with their stomach right and they're going to need more Pull-Ups or more diapers…Just like with medicine, we never know if we're going to need more of this. Because

there's times when one will get sick and we'll have enough. But if all three get sick it's…okay, I'm running out. You know, I may have bought this a few weeks ago but I need more.

Other participants discussed the uncertainty they faced in determining how they were going to achieve their dreams amid ongoing financial ambiguity and hardship. Heather, 46, worried about helping her children become successful, and Megan, 33, was concerned about how she would be able to accomplish her goal of one day owning a home.

DISCUSSION

The study's first research question sought to ascertain the types of financial uncertainty experienced by participants. It was important to identify the specific forms of financial uncertainty encountered by participants because "understanding various types of uncertainty enhances our ability to describe and explain its influences on behavior and to develop strategies for improving people's lives" (Brashers, 2001, p. 479). The investigation found that participants faced uncertainty involving economic-related concerns—relating to the security of their job and value of their home—as well as personal uncertainty about their ability to plan for retirement, make sound investment and health care planning decisions, repay their debt, and save for their children's education. Participants also encountered ambiguity regarding effectively communicating with their partner about money and uncertainty related to their own financial beliefs and identity. For example, some participants were unsure how to resolve the tension between spending and saving money, while others were uncertain about their and/or their partner's ability to maintain their desired financial role (e.g., as breadwinner) during the tumultuous economic times. Several male participants (or their female partners) reported that men viewed themselves as responsible for their family's well-being and that the downturn made them feel uncertain about their ability to provide.

While financially-struggling participants reported greater and more salient sources of uncertainty than the more affluent, the economic downturn brought financial uncertainty to the fore for those who previously were not (very) concerned about finances. For example, participants who had considered themselves well-prepared for retirement but whose investments or home values had considerably declined because of the recession reported uncertainty as to whether they would be able to retire when they had planned or whether they would outlive their retirement savings. Whereas prior to the recession these participants felt largely secure in their financial management, they now reported a general sense of anxiety about the unpredictable state of the economy. In fact, some participants reflected on what they described as their previously naïve belief that as long as they worked hard and saved, their financial needs would be met. The volatile economy served as a sort of wakeup call that participants could no longer take anything financial for granted. In fact, middle- and working-class participants spoke of the heightened uncertainty they faced as they worried that a layoff was all that stood between a fairly comfortable life and poverty. Times were so difficult for some that one participant (Amy, 34) said that the promise of the American Dream was no longer a reality for her and her husband. Indeed, more than one year after Amy's interview, the economy was still so tumultuous that *Time* magazine dedicated its cover to exploring whether the American dream still exists. As the article's lead sentences read:

> The American Dream has seen better days—much better. The perennial conviction that those who work hard and play by the rules will be rewarded with a more comfortable present and a stronger future for their children faces assault from just about every direction (Meacham, 2012, p. 26).

Like an illness that develops despite careful adherence to a healthy lifestyle, many participants' experiences reflect a sense that regardless of careful money management, good intentions, and the promise of the American Dream, they were adversely affected by the downturn. This unanticipated hardship, similar to an unexpected illness, resulted in ambiguity.

Although the recent recession was certainly a source of uncertainty for many, participants also spoke of personal ambiguity independent of the tumultuous economy. Many middle-aged and retirement-aged participants reflected upon periods earlier in their lives when they were unsure how to make financial decisions despite a stable economy, particularly when they were just starting out in their relationships and/or raising children. Other participants mentioned the uncertainty they faced when they or their partner was laid off in the past; one participant even mentioned the hardship they experienced during a recession that took place 40 years ago.

Additionally, some participants reported uncertainty involving their families—specifically how to manage uncertainty pertaining to their partner's or extended family members' financial management. How to handle situations in which a partner spent with abandon or held differing spending priorities emerged as a salient source of partner uncertainty for several participants. For example, although Manny, 37, said that his unionized construction job was not affected by the economy and that he and his wife were more financially stable at the time of the study than they had been during any period of their marriage, he spoke of the uncertainty he felt regarding his wife's financial management/bill paying because she was not as careful with their finances as she had been when they had less money in the bank. His wife's erratic bill paying lowered his credit rating and caused him much anxiety. With respect to uncertainty regarding extended family's money management, some participants spoke of an ambiguity about interactions with siblings regarding negotiating a future inheritance and another participant (Pauleen, 69) worried that her husband's family would gain control of her money after her death.

Last, some participants reported communication uncertainty that stemmed from ambiguity about how to discuss finances with their partner. These individuals did not know how to effectively communicate about money with their significant others. For example, as much as Lee, 36, wanted to talk about financial planning, he said he had been unsuccessful in engaging his wife in money conversations because she regularly ended discussions before anything was decided. The current investigation found that part of the reason some participants were uncertain about how to talk about money, particularly their partner's or extended family members' financial management, was because they feared arguments or confrontation.

Worries about conflict compounded participants' existing sources of financial uncertainty, as participants needed to manage both financial uncertainty and their relationships. Indeed, finances are consistently ranked as a significant cause of conflict (Erbert, 2000; Zietlow & Sillars, 1988) and one of the top sources of arguments in romantic relationships (Papp et al., 2009; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002), particularly when families perceive that they are financially unstable (Conger & Elder, 1994a; Papp et al., 2009). Participants in the current study recounted frustration and arguments they faced pertaining to finances, particularly during periods of economic hardship. As Kathy, 57, said, "When money's bad, the arguments ensue, I do know that."

While most participants encountered acute uncertainty—uncertainty that was perceived to be limited in nature (e.g., regarding the housing market), some participants were faced with managing chronic uncertainty—ongoing ambiguity about how they were going to make ends meet and get by financially (e.g., negotiating their long-term low-income status). Chronic uncertainty involves the sense that, similar to numerous and ongoing sources of ambiguity confronting the chronically ill (Mishel, 1990) and long-term job insecure (e.g., Heaney et al., 1994), chronically low-income participants were faced with ongoing uncertainty about how they were going to make ends meet and get by financially. As Hilda, 40, explained, she and her partner were unsure about how to make money, pay bills, and run their business. Long-term low-income participants, such as Megan, 33, lived paycheck to paycheck and maintained little control over their income. For years, uncertainty had been a permanent fixture of the lives of these participants, many of whom had fallen upon hard times due to long-term unemployment, layoffs caused by closing factories and businesses, crippling debt due to school loans or a quest for material goods, and/or a lack of financial education and literacy that prohibited them from making sound financial choices.

The first research question uncovered that financial uncertainty transcends age, sex, socioeconomic status, and family background. The finding that financial uncertainty applied to participants across all income levels (from the self-described "poor" to the self-described "rich" and everyone in between) and that most participants viewed this uncertainty aversely supports previous research that families of all socioeconomic levels can experience economic stress (Papp et al., 2009), and that no one is immune from uncertainty. The types of financial uncertainty that emerged from the data (economic, personal, family, communication, and chronic) reinforce the role of finances as a significant source of uncertainty in relationships and build on and richly illustrate the finding that married couples are uncertain about finances (Knobloch, 2008). The current study provides additional insight into what this uncertainty looks like and, unlike previous research that viewed uncertainty regarding retirement, careers, and communication as distinct from financial uncertainty (Knobloch, 2008), this investigation reconceptualized these issues as part of the financial uncertainty realm. Additionally, this study sheds light on the types of uncertainty experienced not just by married spouses, but cohabiting partners as well, finding that regardless of official marital status, financial uncertainty is salient.

Part of the reason financial uncertainty emerged as so salient for so many likely involves the fact that money is necessary in order for survival, yet people are largely ill informed about how to manage money (e.g., Cunningham, 2012; Godsted & McCormick, 2007). In the words of Claire, 25, a librarian, "You need money to do everything—to eat, to live, to drive. You can't do anything without money." People are forced to make decisions about money and manage money every day, and being in a romantic relationship involves coordinating this negotiation, at least to some extent, with a partner.

Chapter Six: Results: Uncertainty Management Strategies (RQ2)

The first research question uncovered that many participants faced uncertainty with respect to the economy and its effect on jobs and housing values, as well as ambiguity relating to retirement, investments, medical decisions, higher education, debt, partners and families, communication, identity and beliefs, and being chronically low-income. It is thus critical to understand how participants negotiate these various forms of financial uncertainty, as financial management plays an essential role in people's economic and relational welfare (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Braunstein & Welch, 2002; Greenspan, 2005; Wilcox & Marquardt, 2009). Addressing the second research question, the data reflect several ways in which participants managed uncertainty.

Participants managed uncertainty by reducing, maintaining, and adapting to it. Overall, participants largely attempted to reduce their uncertainty because they appraised it as aversive. Participants reduced uncertainty via information seeking, modifying individual behavior, communally coping, and strategically communicating. Other participants sought to maintain financial uncertainty. These participants, who preferred financial ambiguity to a potentially unfavorable certainty, primarily maintained their uncertainty via avoiding or trying not to think about the uncertainty-producing event, or continuing to engage in activities that made them uncertain. Additionally, some participants adapted to chronic financial uncertainty by relying on religion, learning to juggle bill payments, and seeing the big picture.

REDUCING UNCERTAINTY

Many participants appraised financial uncertainty as a stressor which they sought to reduce via communication, through relying on information, modifying individual behavior, communally coping, and strategically communicating.

Relying on Information

Consistent with strategies used by people facing uncertainty in health, organizational, and family contexts, one of the major ways in which participants reported addressing their financial uncertainty was by seeking information (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Brashers et al., 2003). This problem-focused coping strategy involved active and passive information seeking and reliance on experiential information.

Active-Information Seeking

Proactively seeking financial information emerged as a common way in which participants sought to reduce their financial uncertainty. When trying to determine how they were going to make ends meet after April, 36, quit her job, she and her husband consulted a financial advisor who provided them with information about how to effectively manage their money and put themselves in the best financial position so that their son could maximize scholarships and grants for college. As April explained:

> When we talked to that Christian advisor, he said, "You know, actually, when your son goes to school, when he goes to college…All of [the small amounts set aside for him in Roths and education IRAs] will actually hurt you really horrifically if you have it." And he was right. Because if we would have continued to build on what we had [my son] probably wouldn't have been able to go to [the local] college.

The advisor provided April and her husband with information that enabled them to figure out how to meet their daily needs and make it possible for their son to attend college. Seeking assistance thus enabled them to reduce their ambiguity. Donna, 63, exemplifies another participant who sought advice from financial experts to reduce uncertainty by gaining a greater understanding of financial management practices. As she put it:

> We had an accountant that told us, you know, always pay your taxes, so that's one thing we've always done. If it got tight at home or we didn't have a whole lot of food on the table, we paid the taxes first. And both of us are very adamant about making sure that our bills are kept up to date. We never wanted to have a bad financial standing, and it's always been really, really good. Every time we go to the bank if we need a loan or something like that, it's always top-notch ratings so we've always kept it that way.

Consulting an advisor also helped Donna and her husband reduce their uncertainty about not understanding their financial statements. As she recounted, "I end up having to call the broker and say, "Okay, what's this mean?" By asking the broker for help, Donna was better able to navigate the complexity of her investments, which reduced her uncertainty. Some participants also turned to brokers as third-party experts to talk with their partners about finances, instead of asking their partner to take their word about investments or putting themselves in a position where their partner could begrudge them for unsound investment advice. Enlisting the assistance of an expert helped partners make decisions and minimized investment-related conflict. As Bob, 63, explained, his wife was much more conservative about money and reluctant to invest than he, yet they both maintained Roth accounts and had to decide how to invest $6,000 every year. Bob said that he had her talk with the financial planner to help decide where she should invest her Roth. Although there was no guarantee that the broker could promise a 5% return "every year for the next 20 years" as his wife had requested, the broker was able to provide his wife with greater insight into investing and took the investment pressure off Bob.

Aside from seeking information from experts, participants reported relying on print and computer-mediated information to reduce their financial uncertainty. Donna, 63, said that she regularly sought out the monthly column in her husband's *Elks*

Magazine to better educate herself about money and jumpstart financial conversations with her husband. As Donna explained:

> This guy writes a column on what to do with your money, you know, how to save it and what to look forward to… Frequently I'll take the article out of the magazine and show it to [my husband] and he'll read it, and then we talk about it.

Not only did the advice column provide Donna with financial information, but it served as a conversation starter for her and her husband to engage in financial communication. Some participants, such as Ellen, 48, went online to make financial decisions, particularly when she and her husband were unsure of a financial decision or disagreed on an approach. In these cases, they conducted internet research to better inform themselves of their options. As Ellen explained:

> We'll kind of go to our separate corners and I'll go do some research and find out more about this particular topic or see what this particular financial-planning expert says about what you should do with this kind of money at this point in your lives, and he'll go research something else.

Seeking information via online research helped Ellen and her husband constructively resolve their differences and reduce their uncertainty about their financial options. She said this approach also reduced arguments, because their positions were backed by research, not emotion. Additionally, Gary, 62, said that when he and his wife wanted to make purchases, "We're not going to enter it blindly. We do our homework and figure out what we ought to be paying, then get the best value for the money." Taking the time to conduct research enabled participants to make financial decisions that reduced their uncertainty and minimized relational conflict.

Passive-Information Seeking

Another way in which participants reported seeking financial information was by coming upon financial information via their interactions with others or by their observations of others' experiences. While participants did not directly solicit this information, it served to help them reduce financial uncertainty.

One significant source of passive-information seeking involved unsolicited advice. For example, Kelly, 32, said that her parents never discussed money with her and she grew up unsure how to handle her finances. However, prior to her wedding her older brother sat her down and explained the importance of saving and talking about finances with one's partner early on in marriage. As Kelly explained, "He's like, 'The first five years is when you really want to crunch down for your financial future' and this and that, and I was like, 'Okay.' So in the last few years [my partner and I] really have been [saving]." Kelly said that she took her brother's advice to heart and that she and her partner made saving a priority in their relationship. Her brother's advice reduced Kelly's uncertainty about how to navigate finances in her new marriage, particularly since she did not receive a financial education from her family.

Additionally, April's employment and saving decisions were greatly informed by conversations she had with her husband's grandparents and her elderly neighbors. April, 36, said that when she was trying to decide whether she should quit her job to take care of their children (which would significantly reduce the family's household income), her husband's grandparents helped her make the decision and reduced her uncertainty by making statements such as, "Yes, baby, you gotta stay at home. You gotta take care of those kids. It's not about money; it's about doing what you love, and if that's what you want to do…" and "Oh, you've got to enjoy life while you're in it." Further, conversations with neighbors helped April negotiate uncertainty about enjoying life versus being financially prudent when it came to taking family trips. As she explained:

> We went to Colorado four years ago, and I was feeling the pinch. Like we always go up North every summer, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, we're going to Colorado *and* we're going up North." And we also, our kids have always gone to the Junior Olympics and so we always road trip out there, too, so I was like, "How are we going to be able do this?" And the neighbors… they just advise, they're just such advisors in life. They're like, "You gotta do those things. You'll bounce back! …You may have to skip your electric payment, be late, but you need to do those things because that's what life's about."

April relied on advice from her relatives and neighbors to determine how to make important life decisions.

Another way participants reduced their uncertainty via passive-information seeking was by observing the financial experiences of others around them. For example, Kathy, 57, said that she and her husband were worried that one of them would experience "bad health issues" in the future and that they would not be able to afford to take care of each other. Seeing what her grandmother went through struggling to take care of her grandfather on her own because she could not afford assistance made Kathy realize that she and her husband could resolve their uncertainty about managing their health care by purchasing a long-term health care policy to help offset future health care costs. As Kathy explained, "Okay, you know, there's other people that we've watched that happen to that they didn't have somebody come in because they couldn't afford it. And maybe that would be a better idea for us." Kathy's grandmother's experience provided Kathy with the information necessary to reduce her uncertainty about how she and her husband were going to be able to afford health care costs.

Similarly, Edward, 71, relied on the experience of a good friend's death to reduce his uncertainty about whether he and his wife should be saving more money for retirement and traveling less or saving less and continuing to travel while they were still healthy. Edward said he and his wife had just landed from a vacation and:

> My wife had a text message as soon as she turned her phone on to call our son. We knew something was wrong, and one of our best friends died…just a year older than me, and seemed to be in good health. He was driving down by Indianapolis and keeled over in the car, went off into the median…came out of the median and crossed all the lanes of oncoming traffic and hit a guardrail. And of course he didn't survive; he was probably dead right from the get go…But you see that and you know, you say…my wife says, "We have enough; we can take this trip." And we have traveled a great deal.

Edward's uncertainty was reduced following his friend's untimely death, because he now possessed the information needed to make decisions about how to allocate money. Edward realized that death is unpredictable and that he should ease up on saving in order to enjoy life and travel with his wife while they were still well.

Experiential-Information Use

A reliance on experiential information, also referred to as event familiarity (Mishel, 1988), involves applying previous exposure or knowledge of an event or situation in order to reduce uncertainty. In the current study, participants reported seeking financial information through familiarity with finances, via parent-child financial socialization or a direct reliance on their own previous money-related experiences.

Several participants spoke of ways in which they had been able to reduce their financial uncertainty by relying on the financial knowledge their parents had imparted or modeled to them, via financial socialization. For example, Heidi's mother deliberately taught her to pay bills, a practice which Heidi, 39, currently engaged in as her family's financial manager. As Heidi explained, she and her husband decided she should manage the household finances because of her "strong financial background." Heidi said she tried to teach the lessons she learned as a child to her own daughters:

> [My mom] would have me sit down and help her once I got old enough because she wanted me to learn how to pay bills. And she was the one that actually taught me how to use the calendar because she did the same thing…I do the same thing with [my children]. My oldest one sits down with me and I'll say, "Okay this is what money we have. Now show me what bills I can pay and how I can pay them." And I'll start that with each one of them because they have to know how to pay bills.

Similarly, Kathy, 57, relied on financial education she received from her parents as well as her own hands-on experiences managing economic downturns to negotiate financial uncertainty. As she explained:

> We had kids in the early 70's when one of the recessions hit, and it seems like [my husband] was laid off more than what he worked. So we learned to—we were raised by Depression-era parents—so we learned from them how far you could stretch a dollar. And we still pretty much still apply that today. We try not to have any bills that you can't handle on unemployment because in this day and age, you just don't know.

Participants who learned about finances as children were equipped with the financial acumen necessary to reduce their uncertainty as adults. They could depend on these skills to negotiate difficult financial times.

Firsthand knowledge of finances also helped some participants reduce their uncertainty later in life. Fuerza, 63, explained that direct interaction with finances at a young age helped shape her money management abilities and build her financial confidence. Fuerza said she grew up "very poor" and because she was bilingual, was tasked with helping her Spanish-speaking parents manage their finances. She equated this hands-on financial experience with helping her learn how to effectively manage her own personal finances:

> Very early I had to do the budgeting with my parents and you know we struggled for years and years, and I was only like 12, and because I'm bilingual, then I had to help them out with their budgets. When they were late with payments and stuff, I had to go before *the man* and talk with them about being late with the payment…That's why I've always been responsible. My aunt always says, "I used to feel so sorry for you 'cause you didn't have a normal childhood 'cause you always had to be very responsible for everybody and everything."

Fuerza's direct experience learning how to manage finances as a child provided her with a solid background on which she could rely to become financially responsible in the future. Because she had encountered uncertain times in the past, she was able to apply her knowledge to reduce financial uncertainty as an adult. Similarly, Jack, 68, relied on his personal knowledge of management and business to negotiate economic ambiguity. He said that 27 years of experience "turning around small hospitals" made him feel confident that he could navigate even the stormiest financial waters. As he explained, "I've turned so many hospitals around; I've started so many things; I've organized so many things, that tomorrow I could go start a business." Jack's prior accomplishments and belief in his demonstrated ability reduced his uncertainty about economic challenges because he knew that he could always earn money if need be. Being able to call upon their previous experience provided financially-educated participants with the confidence in which to reduce the financial uncertainty with which they were currently confronted.

Participants' reliance on information seeking aligns with both the early uncertainty literature (e.g., Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and recent uncertainty management research. For example, patients who experienced fear and anxiety about HIV engaged in active, passive, and experiential information seeking behavior (such as talking with doctors, friends, and family to learn more information; surrounding themselves with patients with similar conditions; or relying on previous experiences; Brashers et al., 2003). Additionally, adoptees who felt uncertain about their adoption experience deliberately sought information about their birth parents online (Powell & Afifi, 2005). Across contexts, communication has consistently emerged as an important way in which people can reduce uncertainty.

Modifying Individual Behavior

Another way in which participants reduced uncertainty was by adjusting their personal behavior. For example, to assuage her worries about whether she and her husband would have enough money to live on after he retired, Edna, 67 (who was retired, whose spouse was soon preparing to retire, and who described their economic status as "okay"), decided to minimize personal spending as much as possible, even though at the time of the study her husband was still a few months away from retiring. As Edna explained:

> I always feel like, you know, even though it's not until June that we have to worry about him retiring, I'm sitting here and thinking, "Well, I really don't need to go get that done." "Oh, I really don't need to do with that." And then he says to me, "Oh, go ahead and get it done," you know, like a massage or something,

> you know, that feels good. And I've done that while he's been working. Um, my mindset gets to the point where even though he's retiring in June, I wanna be frugal, you know, a couple months before.

Making the decision to curtail her spending helped Edna feel better about the couple's financial well-being, helping to reduce her uncertainty about whether they would have enough money to get by. Similarly, because Pauleen, 69, worried that she might not have enough money to live comfortably once she retired, she had decided to delay her retirement. Further, to ease her concerns about how the family would manage if her husband were to lose his job, April, 36, made plans to return to work once their youngest child began all-day preschool. Additionally, Megan, 33, addressed her anxiety about whether her partner would provide more for the family by issuing him an ultimatum. As she explained, "I just told him he probably had to get a job or he probably had to move out." Megan said that "he was getting a little too comfortable not doing nothing," and that the time had come for him to support the household. After trying to help her partner find a job and "experiencing him getting turned down and things like that," she accompanied him to a nearby community college to look into taking classes. "I told him he had to go to school or something. And that's when he went in and talked to the counselors, and they're going to figure out—they have a lot of trades, you can go into machine work." Megan actively worked to confront the stressor of her partner's lack of financial contribution and reduce her uncertainty about the extent of his contributions by no longer accepting his behavior. She demanded that he get a job, go to school, or move out.

In order to reduce uncertainty regarding affordability of the high cost of health care, several participants explained that the main reason they had not retired was to continue receiving health care benefits. Preston, 76 (a self-employed attorney married to a homemaker who described their financial status as sound), was uncertain about the cost of health care, particularly since his wife had been diagnosed with cancer the previous year. He relied on private insurance as well as Medicare but worried that Congress would alter the program and he would be unable to afford health care costs. “That’s one of the big reasons I guess I’m still working,” he stated. Although Maureen, 59, described her and her husband’s financial status as “rich,” she said she had intentionally continued working because her husband, who had cancer, was covered by her insurance policy. As she explained, “I don’t want to quit until I’m sure he’s got full coverage.” Similarly, Fuerza, 63, was still working in large part to save money on health insurance. She said that she was uncertain about how she would afford a “major sickness or something like that” once she had to pay a portion of her own insurance after she retired. As Fuerza explained, after retirement:

> You go on Medicare, but they only pay 80%, and then you’ve got the other 20%, and right when your body starts breaking down is when, you know, you stop working. I have great benefits [at my job], and you know…I would be alright without working, you know, and just take the early retirement, but I don’t want to because I have great benefits. I have great insurance—dental and eye and health.

Because participants worried about health costs, they managed their uncertainty by deliberately prolonging their employment when they otherwise would have retired.

Another way in which some participants reduced their (and/or their partner’s) uncertainty was by not disclosing information to their significant other; similar to the concept of “protective buffering” (Coyne & Smith, 1991; 1994), in which people conceal concerns in order to prevent conflict or stress. For example, Pauleen, 69, reduced her uncertainty about whether her husband’s family would gain control of her money after her death by keeping the specific amount of her savings from her husband. As she explained, as much as she wanted to tell him, her husband's family's actions were too unpredictable:

> I wish that I could be…I often feel like I can't be honest with him about the money that I have because I feel like he would, um….that would get to be public information... he'd always figure out a way to make sure that his family knew…and I just think that I can't be open about that kind of stuff. I can't be open about that.

She did not want her husband's family to know how much money she saved because she was concerned they would convince him to recklessly spend her money at the expense of her children's inheritance. By keeping this information from her husband, she was able to reduce her uncertainty that his family would learn about her savings and pressure him to spend it.

Maureen, 59, also concealed financial information from her husband in order to reduce uncertainty about the family's financial well-being. Earlier in their marriage, during periods of economic hardship, Maureen said she worried that her husband would hinder her saving efforts because he resisted putting money away. Although she managed the money, she said he spent every dollar she gave him. As a result, she saved and invested money behind his back, which enabled them to afford a nice house, much to her husband's disbelief. Maureen recalled an instance when she and her husband were meeting with a real estate agent and reviewing their accounts to determine what type of a house they could afford:

> "Where the hell did all this money come from?" [my husband] asked, and I said, "Well, you know how on Fridays when you ask for money and I say I only have $10?" I said, "I probably had 20 or 30 and I gave you five because I was going to put the rest away." So I've been like this all along.

Because Maureen believed her husband would have prevented her from saving by spending all the money they earned, she concealed the true amount of their finances to the financial benefit of the family. This strategy also aligns with the notion that when people perceive the risks of a disclosure as outweighing the rewards, they do not reveal (e.g., Petronio, 2002; Romo, 2011). Maureen perceived financial stability as more beneficial than financial openness.

Communal Coping

Another approach participants who appraised financial uncertainty as a stressor used to reduce their financial ambiguity involves engaging in communal coping (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). Communal coping, conceptualized by Lyons et al. (1998) and expanded by Afifi et al. (2006), focuses on the ways in which people in relationships interdependently manage individual (e.g. job loss) and/or collective (e.g., a recession) stressors. Communal coping involves "the pooling of resources and efforts of several individuals (e.g., couples, families, or communities) to confront adversity" (Lyons, et al., 1998, p. 580). As opposed to individual coping (in which a person perceives a stressor as his or her problem and that he or she is solely responsible for dealing with it) or social support (in which either the stressor is shared but one person takes responsibility for it, or the stressor is viewed as one person's problem but responsibility is shared), both the stressor and responsibility are co-owned in communal coping (Lyons et al., 1998). Communal coping can occur when partners experience the same or similar stressors, regardless of whether they are affected by the stressor in the same way (Lyons et al., 1998). Communal coping can also take place when "the partner of the person who is experiencing a chronic illness or other serious ailment assumes the stressor as jointly owned and takes dual responsibility for it"

(Afifi et al., 2006, p. 381). Communication plays a pivotal role in communal coping, as people must discuss the stressor in order to take action (Lyons et al., 1998).

In the current study, by viewing aversively-perceived financial uncertainty as both partners' problem and responsibility, many participants reflected a sense that they and their partners co-owned the uncertainty. These partners mutually negotiated ambiguity through their financial interaction. Consistent with research on communal coping enacted by members of divorced families (e.g., Afifi et al., 2006), participants in the current study jointly engaged in problem solving and planning to directly confront financial uncertainty together. This finding extends communal coping to the uncertainty management realm.

Many participants in the present investigation reported the importance of negotiating finances with their partner. Tom, 62, explained that often when couples experience financial stress, partners view themselves as "two dogs in the fight," and "If one of those dogs feels they have to be the alpha dog and they try to get the other one to submit…there's your problem." He said that with his wife, "There is no fight, there is no alpha and beta; it's just we do things together and that's just how it is." Because he and his wife shared financial stressors and viewed one another as equally responsible for managing them, they were able to collectively reduce their financial uncertainty. Even if partners held separate financial accounts, participants acknowledged that it was important to coordinate finances and confront uncertainty together because individual monies still affected the couple's bottom line: their overall financial well-being. As Charmaine, 45, explained, "Because even though [money's] in our separate accounts, it's still for our retirement…it's like backup, you know. And even though you're able to spend it, you still have to make sure that you're not spending too much of it." One partner's faulty financial management would invariably affect the other partner and the couple's financial security. To reduce uncertainty about bill paying and financial management, many couples engaged in communal coping by designating clear financial roles for one another, devising a financial plan, establishing a budget, changing joint financial behavior, and developing purchasing rules. In this way, participants were involved in "active engagement", as they jointly tackled and communicated about uncertainty (Coyne & Smith, 1991; 1994).

Designating Clear Financial Roles

Many participants created financial management roles for one another to reduce their uncertainty about whether bills would be paid and/or how the household would run. These roles generally involved playing to each partner's strengths. For example, as Lori, 57, explained:

> I think probably there is one person…who can sit down and have the patience to go through all the bills and prioritizing and if the other person isn't good at that but they're good at making the money they both contribute some. [My partner] makes the money and she is really good with numbers, but I am the one who does the budget, because for some reason it does not drive me nuts to sit down and say, "Okay, this needs to go here," and well, I am better at it than she is.

Cindy, 48, explained that she was also the person in her relationship who paid all the bills and wrote all the checks, while her husband handled investments and retirement. They purposely divided the tasks in that manner based on their personalities and skills. As Cindy said:

> Well, the first six months that we were dating my husband lost his checkbook twice, and I am not kidding. So I was like, that's not a good feeling, and I just am a controlling person when it comes to that, so I do all the check writing and I

> guess…he is more of a risk taker so the finance/investment thing makes more sense for him. I would worry about that too much.

Kathy, 57, said that she and her husband decided to embrace financial roles based on their interests. She said she paid bills and he balanced the checkbook because "he hates writing checks and I hate balancing the checkbook." Tom, 62, stated that during his first two years of marriage he and his wife were overlapping paying bills and that life was smoother once they designated her in charge of the indoor work (including finances) and him in charge of the outdoor tasks. Similarly, Francine, 43, was able to reduce uncertainty about whether bills would be paid by taking on that responsibility. As she explained: "If I left it up to [my husband] it's not, you know, in a bad way or anything, it's just with him being older he forgets, so if I don't [take over] the responsibility then it probably won't get paid, so it works."

Joe, 64, also reported that he and his wife divvied financial management responsibilities based on each other's strengths, which enabled them to avoid worrying about the tasks the other person managed:

> Well, my wife is a detail person and she is really good about staying organized and keeping on top of all the budget stuff and all the bills and all that stuff, and I am not good at that, so she's definitely playing to her strength…I understand tax law better than she does; I understand things like investment better than she does; she doesn't have any clue how the stock market works, and I do. I am sure I have a firmer foot on the accelerator on that one than she does, just like she does on, "Gee, how much money do we have left to spend this month? Can we take a trip or can we put a new roof on the house?" You know, that would be something where she would have a stronger voice. I couldn't tell you even close how much

> money we have saved, not even close. I don't care; she has that covered, she knows.

Tasking the more financially-responsible partner with financial planning allowed participants to reduce their uncertainty about household financial functioning. As Maureen, 59, who was in charge of every aspect of her family's finances, put it, her husband always said, "It's a good thing you [manage the family finances] because I wouldn't have two nickels to rub together. I would've spent everything." Ellen, 48, mentioned that her and her husband's financial roles changed depending on their current economic status. As she explained:

> I would say there's a kind of a give and take as far as who is kind of taking the lead. When things are tight, and if we're concerned—like we went through a phase, um, I was downsized from my job when I was working, and my husband recently had kind of a job scare like a year ago when things were, some corporate shakeups at the home office that we were a little worried about his job security. And we've kind of developed this rapport that when things are good, that he kind of takes the road as far as leading our management of finances, but when things are tight and strict, we kind of have this agreement that, you know, I take charge. I'm calling up and I'm canceling things, and I'm getting a little bit more hands-on.

Ellen said that very early in their marriage, when she and her husband were "watching every dime," they assessed their individual responses to money matters and collectively implemented deliberate financial management strategies depending on their current financial situation. As she recalled, her husband's "instinct was always to buy and spend; mine is to save. He's like the gas and I'm the brakes" when it comes to money. As she explained:

> I'm much more inclined to feel the need to save, and he will, when things are feeling flush, or like when he's just got a bonus, his attitude is, "Why are you worried? We've got such-and-such dollars in the account! Let's go out to dinner or take a vacation!" And my attitude is, "Well, that's fine, but we don't know that that's always going to be the case. Let's just save it."

Even though Ellen said her husband has described her as a "buzz kill" at times, she explained they agreed early on in their relationship that they needed to compromise and play to each other's strengths if they wanted to be financially stable and minimize conflict. As she explained, "respecting where the other one comes from, and knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses… probably solidified our relationship… we're okay and we've figured out a way to make that work."

Consistent with the idea of designated roles is the idea of conceding decision making to the partner who has more expertise in a particular area. As Jack, 68, explained: "Anything big is a joint decision. And if it's in her turf [e.g., home remodeling] then I give way" and vice versa. Kathy, 57, said that she completely deferred to her husband with respect to investments because "I know that that's his thing. He knows that stuff." Sometimes deferring to one's partner took time. Ernie, 69 (a retired factory supervisor who works as a barber, whose wife is a retired principal and who described their status as "secure"), explained that his wife had to learn to have faith in him before he could be completely in charge of investments. Ernie said that once they established this trust, he and his wife were able to talk openly about money. As he explained, trust is the hallmark of effective financial communication: "I think it takes people to trust each other to really have a good conversation about money. There's an old story that money is the root of all evil, and I believe that…if there's no trust, there's no conversation." Yielding decisions not only reflected trust in one's partner but, consistent with existing literature, seemed to benefit couples' relationships. Indeed, research finds that couples are happier when they have decision making power in their area of expertise (Beach, 2001). Further, a qualitative study of couples who described themselves as having a "great marriage" revealed that designating and trusting a spouse to manage finances was an important component of a successful relationship (Skogrand, Johnson, Horrocks, & DeFrain, 2011).

Devising a Financial Plan

A major way in which participants were able to reduce their uncertainty about finances was by working with their partners to create a financial plan to map out financial priorities and establish present and future goals. April, 36, and her husband developed a financial plan in order to determine how they could make ends meet after she quit her job to stay home with their six children. As she recalled:

> First of all, we made a plan. We said ok; I felt that calling. I felt it in my heart that I wanted to stay at home with the kids, and we knew we were going to have more kids, and so I actually quit… when we got pregnant with our third one I said, "I know I want to stay at home with this one," so we came up with a plan and we actually did something that's unheard of. We took out a loan on my 401(k), which at that time was probably like $40,000, and you get a huge penalty—you get a 30% penalty on doing that at tax time—but we took a loan on it and we paid off all of our debt besides school loans. But we paid off our credit card, we paid off our time share, we paid off our car loans. So I worked for nine months for free… We paid off [my husband's] medical bills, we paid off half of his school loans—so the only thing we had left were house, all of our utilities, our rental properties, and then our school loans….Before, we were huge savers. I mean, we had Roth IRAs—we had two Roth IRAs, we had my 401(k). We don't have

any savings anymore, which goes against, totally goes against the grain of society, but I'm so accepting of that.

Even though their plan was nontraditional, it enabled April and her husband to move forward with their financial management goals and reduce uncertainty about how they were going to get by.

Similarly, Kelly, 32, said that she and her partner relied on plans to manage their finances. She said when they first started dating, they would "take trips and cruises and you know, we didn't save any money." However, in the past two years, they had created plans to figure out how to make ends meet after she lost her business and they decided to pay for sperm injections in their hopes of having a baby. After Kelly's dance studio was forced to close its doors, rather than argue, she and her partner turned their attention to "figuring out how we are going to get through this." Kelly said her partner said, "Okay, let's sit down. Let's do this." They came up with a plan that included reducing expenditures (e.g., buying generic brands, downgrading their cable to basic) and moving into a smaller, less expensive house. As Kelly explained, "It was stressful. It was hard. But you do it. You do what you have to do." She and her partner reduced their uncertainty together. Kelly recalled that, "It's not more or less fighting about it, but it's more or less putting our heads together and collaborate where we can cut and save and kind of come up with this money." Similarly, in order to generate the initial $2,000 to begin the sperm donor process, Kelly said she and her partner sat down to figure out, "Okay, where do we start? How do we begin the process? How do we accumulate this much money to begin the process?" Kelly and her partner jointly tackled their financial challenges, largely by planning.

Additionally, Edna, 67, said that she recognized her husband was stressed and unhappy at his job and so they collectively planned how they could afford for him to retire four years early, even though early retirement would mean a loss of monthly income. As Edna explained:

> He was so stressed out, and you could see it in his face. I said to him on a Sunday, "Let's sit down and discuss [how you can retire]." I just thought four years of quality life is better than an extra $400 in paycheck.

Edna said that "when he's stressed, so am I; it's contagious." The anxiety not only affected her husband but herself, consistent with the notion of emotional contagion, in which one person's stress transfers to another (Coyne, 1976). After all, uncertainty does not take place in a vacuum—one partner's stressors affect both partners (Goldsmith, 2009). Even though they would have less money each month, making the decision for her husband to retire reduced uncertainty and stress for both Edna and her husband.

Indeed, several participants spoke about how plans helped them reduce uncertainty about achieving a particular financial goal, such as saving for retirement. Five years ago, Kathy, 57, said that she and her husband jointly created a plan to make "retirement" (being able to afford to work part time) a reality. They completely overhauled their spending habits in order to pay down their debt and reduce their expenditures and were less than $1,000 away from becoming debt free at the time of data collection. Kathy said she and her husband made a deliberate decision to "finally say, 'Yes, we have to do this,' and then to follow through because it's been a long five years to follow through." Part of this planning involved forgoing the use of credit cards. As Kathy explained:

> I don't even have a credit card any more. If we don't have cash to pay for it, we don't have it. And that was, that was really hard, giving the credit cards up and not being able to buy what I wanted, and to have to map everything out. That six months probably was pretty miserable for both of us, but, um, and more so for

me because I just made it miserable for him. But after I got used to it, it was kind of like, um, like an addiction-type thing. Once you get past that coming down from not being able to do it and thinking, "Oh, I really *can* live with [not spending]." I now have needs. Do I *need* that instead I *want* that and go buy it. I don't do any, um, impulse spending anymore. It's a rare, rare occasion. Um, it's more, do I *need* this? And if I buy this, what am I going to do with it? Where am I going to put it? What use is it gonna have? So that's really changed our outlook on a lot of stuff.

Before she and her husband made a retirement plan, Kathy said:

> Oh, I just bought left and right. I loved buying things, things that made me feel good, and, um, I would use them for a while, and when I got tired of them I'd have a garage sale and get rid of them. And now, I don't. And now it's so nice not to have all that *stuff*.

Despite the difficulty of drastically cutting back her spending and the stress that she initially felt from modifying her ways, Kathy and her husband were able to successfully make changes together and share in a commitment to enacting deliberate financial actions to make their financial future a reality. Because they worked on the plan together and had jointly invested in it, they were able to accomplish their goals.

Additionally, Donna, 63, said that planning enabled her and her husband to take deliberate steps to pay off their debt in order to retire. They were working hand in hand to accomplish their goal and reduce ambiguity about whether retirement was possible. As Donna stated, "We discuss [retirement] and then plan for it. We're at the point in our lives where we want to get everything paid off so we can retire and not have any debt, so that's coming real closely and it's working." Donna said that she and her husband did not always possess this teamwork mindset. Earlier in their marriage her husband would regularly buy new trucks, even though she thought they needed the money "for something at home—furniture or carpeting or whatever. But he pretty much got his way back then." Before they aligned their financial priorities, Donna said she and her husband regularly fought about money. As Donna explained, "We've come a long way in our marriage since then. A lot of things have happened, a lot of things have changed, and so we talk things out now, but back then I think it was just a stalemate." The couple not only learned how to better communicate over the years, but her husband became less materialistic and, as Donna put it, realized "what's really important in life."

Previous research has found that couples with "great marriages" possessed little or no debt or were committed to reducing debt (Skogrand et al., 2011). The current study suggests that jointly tackling debt and planning for the future together was not only critical in reducing financial uncertainty, but in minimizing conflict because partners were collaborating on shared goals and talking through finances together. As Charmaine, 45, explained:

> You have to talk a lot to one another about it. 'Cause I feel better once we talk about it, once we get it out. And you know, it's almost like a load lifted. Once you talk about it and you write it down and it's out there and you know what you need to do, it makes you feel so much better…it just takes some of the stress off knowing that he knows and I know and we know together the same thing and we're on the same page.

Charmaine reflects a sense that communicating about financial uncertainty with her husband provided her with and the emotional support that often accompanies communal coping (Lyons et al., 1998). Because she and her husband were experiencing uncertainty together they were better able to support one another and cope with it. Similarly, Tammy, 31 (who works part time at a store, her husband works in a factory, and who described their status as “probably middle class”), talked about the importance of planning in helping her and her husband understand one another and establish shared financial goals: “We have our disagreements on certain things, but we’re pretty much on the same page in terms of getting the house paid off, loans paid off, knowing what we’ve got to do.”

A critical component of financial planning involved spouses setting priorities and collectively negotiating their views on spending and saving. In fact, Lori, 57, recommended that couples should:

> Sit down and talk about what your philosophy is about getting your bills paid and how important it is to you, and just work it out. Say these are the bills and then anything over and above that just uh…..have some idea of what you’re going to do with it. Is it going to be, just spend it, spend it, spend it? Is it going to be, “Let’s save a little bit? You can have this much to go out and go buy whatever and this little amount over here we’ll save because we know sooner or later we’re going to need that little amount to do something.”

Similarly, Steve, 68, said that couples need to discuss the big picture and their viewpoints and perspectives about finances, which he believed does not happen nearly enough in relationships:

> The biggest total problem all over is a lack of communication on not what we’re going to do tomorrow and where we’re going to go eat and what we’re going to do with spending this five dollars, and how we’re going to save this 10, but what are our expectations of each other, and what do you expect to be today, tomorrow, next week, next year? But we don’t talk about that. We talk about, “How’s our CD doing?” That’s communication between families and finances. That’s bull. It is.

In fact, Heidi, 39, attributed her and her husband's strong marriage to financial planning and communication:

> I think ours is one of the stronger relationships because we do sit down and discuss it, and we do know, okay, we have our downfalls and I overspent here, he's done this, we've went through this, and we've went through that. And because we discuss it, it's made it stronger.

Charmaine, 45, also said that financial planning helped her and her husband establish a more meaningful relationship:

> Talking about [finances] and working on it together, I think it makes you stronger, makes your marriage stronger. Because if you don't talk about it, and then you're all quiet and nobody knows, you don't know what's going on, you don't know what he's thinking, he doesn't know what I'm thinking, it's not good. You have to talk about it.

Despite the financial uncertainty Jeremiah, 42, said he and his wife faced in navigating the tumultuous economy, because they co-managed finances, he stated that money and finances had strengthened their relationship: "Being able to pay bills and keep moving forward, you know, despite the obstacles you face in today's economy…I think it helped." Jeremiah and his wife were able to triumph over economic adversity as a team. This victory over the economy was a victory for them as a couple.

Establishing a Budget

Another way participants and partners worked together to reduce uncertainty was by establishing a budget, jointly allocating money for specific expenses. Indeed, budgeting emerged as an important element of many participants' financial plans. As Charmaine, 45, explained:

> We try to sit down together and we've been working on a budget. We're not very good at it yet; we're still working on it, though. We do it, you know, together, where you write down what bills we've got to pay and we come up with what we can pay and what we can't; it has to wait till the next time.

Nick, 40, said that he and his wife also collectively handled the budget:

> For the most part we try to budget, you know, how much we spend in groceries each week and for gas, and you know, whatever payments are due that week or whatever. We budget everything around—cause we usually get paid every two weeks so we have to budget.

Nick attributed their budgeting to reducing his uncertainty about how his family was going to make ends meet after his layoff. After he lost his job, Nick said he and his wife sat down and reviewed their budget to determine what "we could and couldn't live with, and what we needed." After they "cut back on cable, we cut back on some of the internet stuff and stuff that we didn't necessarily have to have," they were able to keep up with their bills and minimize their ambiguity. As Nick explained, "We've kind of got our budget and everything now and things are starting to smooth back pretty regular now." Although Nick said he wished they did not have to be so careful with their money these days (versus pre-layoff, when he was earning more money and they could afford to spend more liberally), because of the budget, things were "on the right track."

Lori, 57, also said that having a budget helped her and her partner better manage their money. Budgeting helped alleviate some of the uncertainty that they would not have enough money to get by. As Lori put it, "Once you do a budget, then you know what you've got, what you've got to take care of." However, early in their relationship Lori said that her partner refused to budget, which was a huge source of conflict. Only after they were so badly financially struggling that Lori had to borrow money from a relative did her partner realize how upset Lori was by the lack of budget and agreed to establish and adhere to a budget. The budget not only enabled their financial situation to improve but it reduced their relational conflict. Indeed, one of the ways Edna, 67, was able to reduce her uncertainty about not having enough money to live on once her husband retired was by budgeting with her husband. She said they "mapped it out so that we would be taking in and using the same amount of money that he gets normally every week." Similarly, Kim, 26, said that she and her husband regularly sat down to determine how they were going to pay bills and keep food on the table. She recalled:

> We usually sit down and figure out what…how we can work things with each check to make sure we have enough for him to get back and forth to work, to eat, and for us to have food, and for the kids to have what they need and still have enough to pay the bills when they need to be paid.

Additionally, April, 36, said that creating and following a budget enabled her and her husband to provide for their family's well-being:

> In terms of emergency fund or a savings, we don't have that, so basically what we do is we follow the budget. We always have enough, you know. We always have enough left to do like…you know, maybe go out and order pizza twice every pay period, two Sundays. Each Sunday we order pizza. And we always have enough to meet our needs.

April also stated that having a budget was valuable because it minimized conflict over spending. Because the budget detailed expenses in black and white, she and her husband knew exactly how much money they had available at all times and how much they could afford to spend on incidentals.

To offset the restrictive nature of a budget and allow themselves some financial freedom, many participants said that part of budgeting involved allocating one another an “allowance,” which participants also referred to as “petty cash” or “play money,” to spend on whatever they liked. In this way, couples were able to adhere to the budget but still have some individual freedom over their own spending. Ernie, 69, said that he and his wife allocated one another petty cash, which his wife saved all year for an annual shopping spree. Similarly, Charmaine, 45, said that she and her husband created a budget that reflected their philosophy that they “kind of at least have to be able to get one thing a month for yourself.” Allowing for discretionary purchases provided participants with some control over what could be an otherwise rigid financial management process.

It is important to note that not all participants used a budget to reduce uncertainty. More affluent participants (such as Gary, 62, and Preston, 76) generally reported that although they and their partner maintained a budget early on in their relationship, because their finances were in order now and they did not feel uncertainty about spending, a budget was not necessary. This is consistent with the notion that uncertainty can be “more or less salient” during stages of life (Brashers, 2001, p. 481). On the other hand, other participants, for whom financial uncertainty was salient, said that a budget was simply unrealistic for their circumstances. Because they never had enough money or were often faced with unexpected expenses, they saw no use in maintaining a budget, even though a budget could potentially reduce their financial uncertainty. As Cindy, 48, said, “We have tried in the past to stick with a budget. It seems like there is always something that counters it out the window anyways so it doesn’t make sense to have one.” Similarly, Francine, 43, said that she and her husband did not operate by a budget because “we really don’t have a whole lot of money left sometimes so we just do what we can.” Amy, 34, said that because she and her husband had so much credit card debt, they did not see the “point” of budgeting because “we can’t make ends meet without out credit card. We don’t have enough money to pay our bills without the credit card.” Because they did not have the money in the bank and had to rely on credit for their basic needs, they perceived budgeting as futile.

Changing Joint Behavior

Another way in which participants reduced financial uncertainty was by collectively altering their financial behavior. Particularly in the wake of the economic downturn and still-tumultuous economy, participants commonly talked about cutting back so that they would still be able to make ends meet, stay on track with their financial goals (e.g., saving for retirement, paying off debt), or maintain extra money in reserve in case of an emergency. Participants and their partners' behavior changes largely took the form of reducing spending on discretionary items such as name-brand clothes and food, non-essential household repairs, trips, and restaurant meals. Kathy, 57, reflected the sentiments of many participants when she said, "The economy sure has put a big ding into our spending habits." For example, Donna, 63, said that "We're only getting what we really have to." Lori, 57, explained that she and her partner did not "garage sale" or "eat hamburger" much anymore; Bob, 63, reported that he and his wife "don't go out to eat as much, we don't travel as much…just a little more critical of where we're spending money." Tammy, 31, said that she and her husband now "pick a special day" to go out to the movies or to dinner. Ellen, 48, explained that she and her husband were trying to "economize" by cooking at home more, continuing to clip coupons, and traveling to Toronto for summer vacation instead of Europe as they had in previous years. Similarly, Patty, 42, said, "We can't travel like we used to, you know. You just can't afford gas…The little trips we used to take to Chicago for the weekend just aren't happening." Indeed, cutting back on recreation is consistent with national data finding that 54% of

Americans reduced leisure activities following the recession (Career Builder Harris Interactive Poll, 2010).

Although 21% of Americans decreased investing and saving since the recession (Career Builder Harris Interactive Poll, 2010), a few participants said the current economic climate prompted them to save more money for the future, such as for retirement and their children's educations. As Cindy, 48, explained, she and her husband were more committed to saving following the recession, "partly because we weren't thinking about savings as much as we are now because [of] things that happened with the stock market." Tammy, 31, said that in order to reduce their worry about not having enough money for their children's education, she and her husband decided to "put an extra $10 bucks in their account every couple of weeks, you know what I mean, on top of what we put in." For some participants, the downturn served as a wakeup call that they needed to figure out a way to save more money. Putting more money away for retirement and education and better preparing their families for the future helped participants reduce their uncertainty.

Developing Purchasing Rules

Another way in which participants and partners mutually reduced uncertainty about whether they would have enough money to get by and be financially sound was through the development of purchasing rules. Despite research that indicates that many Americans hide purchases and financial information from one another (Goudreau, 2011), most couples in the current study, particularly those with joint accounts, reported establishing policies to run purchases by one another first. By consulting one another prior to making a major purchase (defined by participants as ranging from $5 to upwards of several thousand dollars), couples were able to determine if these purchases were feasible with their current financial status and were able to avoid conflict that could arise if one person bought something without minding the budget. Indeed, a study of couples with self-professed “great marriages” underscores the importance of couples communicating about purchases ahead of time as part of a strong relationship (Skogrand et al., 2011). In the current investigation, Kim, 26, talked about the importance of reviewing bills together and consulting one another prior to making a purchase:

> If you’re actually willing to sit down with your partner and discuss everything that you have to pay and what’s important and discuss what you want to buy and if you can, I think that actually helps instead of somebody going out and buying something and then, “Oh, I didn’t think it’d be a problem,” and then having to try to find the money to replace where that money went. At least this way there’s an open communication so you know where the money is going.

Tom, 62, said that he and his wife implemented a policy of running all purchases over $50 by each other: “Whatever it happens to be, you know, that’s going to involve finances at all, anything over 50 bucks we both talk about it normally.” Similarly, Ellen, 48, explained that neither she nor her husband “spend—outside of groceries or any of that kind of stuff—spend without talking to the other.” Edward, 71, explained that very early in their relationship, he and his wife implemented a policy of talking together about purchases over several hundred dollars before buying because he was concerned about his wife’s spending habits (as he put it, “she’s more willing to spend than I”). Edward explained that spending on big purchases “was one of the things we were concerned about as we were dating because she tended to be a little more free than I was. So we talked about it then.” They also agreed to “sleep on” expensive purchases before making up their minds. Creating a policy to discuss purchases ahead of time and take some time to think them through enabled Edward and his wife to effectively manage their finances and avoid conflict. Kathy, 57, explained that she and her husband ran purchases by one another out of respect and as a practicality—to make sure that money was available. As she explained:

> I think it's just kind of common courtesy. I wouldn't want somebody spending all the money and me going to use it and not have it there. And those are purchases usually that you know, sometimes they're need purchases, but a lot of times they're want purchases. So we just kinda talk those over, or in passing. "I need this…" and you know, or, "I need a new pair of shoes. It's going to cost me $129 because I like Birkenstock shoes. So, you know, I need a new pair of shoes, and they're going to cost about this much. That sound okay to you?" And "Yeah, that sounds good, "or "No, maybe we can wait 'til next week; it's a little bit tighter this week" type thing.

Talking about purchases ahead of time was particularly important for low-income couples who were struggling to make ends meet. Kim, 26, said that after her husband bought a $200 motorcycle jacket and some video games that "set us back" without first consulting her, they implemented a policy in which "if there was something that he truly wanted he had to come to me about it and we had to discuss if it was going to fit or if we could push something back to make it work." As Francine, 43, said, she and her husband ran every purchase by each other out of financial necessity: "Even if it's like a $5 item, I'm just like, 'Can we afford this?'" Francine said:

> If I see something I like I always ask him if I can have it. I hate doing that 'cause then I feel like I'm a little kid asking. And it shouldn't be that way. You should be able to buy each other something and not be like, "Well, you know, can we afford this?"

In contrast to many participants for whom purchasing rules seemed to benefit their relationship, Francine said these guidelines put a damper on her marriage because they reinforced how much she and her husband were struggling and how little financial autonomy they possessed. However, as much as Francine said that she and her husband detested having to clear purchases by one another and wanted the freedom to surprise one another with gifts, she recognized that this policy was a necessary evil because they were living paycheck to paycheck and money was tight. Some months they did not have any money coming in. They needed to carefully monitor their spending.

Strategically Communicating

Another way in which participants reduced uncertainty was via specific metacommunication strategies. Although financial management and communal coping also entail communication, strategic communication involves particular ways in which participants determined whether and how financial communication should be enacted. Participants acknowledged that because money was such a central part of romantic relationships ("any time you are in a relationship finances follow…there's going to be a money trail somewhere for some reason in any kind of a real relationship," Tom, 62, said), financial communication was critical. As Hilda, 40, explained, talking about money is "just like going to bathroom. It can stink but it's necessary." In fact, many participants stated that in order to take control of their finances, they had to talk about money with their partner, even if these conversations were difficult. As Joe, 64, said, "If it is unpleasant, if you talk about it enough times it will get less uncomfortable." Similarly, Ernie, 69, said the only way he and his wife were able to resolve financial disagreements was "by talking, by conversation…it took a lot of hard work. I mean, some things in life, in marriage, it just doesn't happen overnight."

Given the importance of communication, several participants developed strategic communication strategies to foster agreement, reduce financial uncertainty, and minimize conflict. As Kim, 26, put it, "It's important to be able to discuss [finances] with your partner and be able to actually do that without causing argument." As many participants maintained, when money was tight and times were stressful, it could be particularly difficult to talk about finances. Participants engaged in three main strategies to effectively talk about finances: postponing conversations, picking battles, and tailoring communication.

Postponing Conversations

One of the major ways in which participants and partners were able to reduce financial uncertainty and minimize arguments was by deliberately postponing conversations about sensitive financial matters. This "cooling off period" (as Bob, 63, described it) allowed couples time to consider issues and avoid rushing into decisions or fighting. As Joe, 64, explained:

> The way [my wife and I] both operate by personally is that if something is really annoying me or her, we sit on it a day or two and sort it out in our own minds, then we sit down and say, "You know, there is something I would like to talk about with you." That's a very common conversation.

Similarly, as Nick, 40, explained:

> If we get to the point that it feels like [tensions are high], we'll just stop talking about it. We'll say, "Hey, can we just come back to this conversation later? I think we need to give it a break." 'Cause we try not to fight, you know, too much, 'cause it just doesn't ever settle nothing.

Fuerza, 63, also talked about how she and her husband put conversations on hold so they had enough time to think things through before making any decisions:

> If we have a big item that we need to buy or something, you know, we allow for it and discuss it before. We don't just jump into it or anything. We talk about it and we decide when the time is right, price is right, and all that, and then we go ahead and do it. So we talk about things. We don't just jump into spending.

Taking a break to mull over financial decisions before regrouping to talk with their partner helped participants come to more rational and mutually agreed upon decisions.

Picking Battles

In some cases, participants said they postponed conversations indefinitely, as in the case of participants who let issues go in order to avoid conflict. Rose, 61 (a librarian preparing to retire whose husband works as an engineer at a large state university and who described their status as "fine"), said that as much as she believed her husband overspent and that she disagreed with his aggressive retirement strategy, after nearly 34 years of marriage she had learned to relax. As she explained: "I guess I don't care anymore…once you get to that point, it's like, 'Go ahead,' you know…I guess you get a little wiser and you know that, um, you can be wrong and it's ok." Kathy, 57, said that one way she and her husband were able to emerge unscathed during the hardest economic times in their marriage was because "we let a lot of stuff go. You know, you can't dwell on it." Participants chose not to ruminate on the past but instead moved on to focus on financial goals, minimizing conflict by picking their battles. For instance, rather than argue with his wife over a coffee pot, Steve, 68, decided to return it. As he explained:

> I was shopping yesterday, and I had to buy two water softeners, which was pretty pricey, you know, that's 1,000 bucks right there. But they had these brand new

> automatic coffee pots on sale, $49. And I'm not much of a shopper, but once I get out there I'm wheeling. Wow, that's a beautiful coffee pot. It's programmable; I can set it for 5:30 in the morning, and when I get up the coffee's ready. So [my wife] was at a baby shower yesterday and she come home and she looked and said, "Where in the hell is my coffee pot?" I said, "Well, I picked this one up on sale." "You know I don't like big coffee pots like that." So you know what I did? I put the sucker back in the box and I'm going to go back and get my $49. I'm not going to argue over 49 bucks…It's not worth it.

Indeed, several participants said they learned to defer to their partners with respect to purchases in order to avoid conflict. As Preston, 76, explained:

> Every purchase she's always made has been a wise one and a needed thing. Some that I've made or were going to make, weren't very necessary and certainly we couldn't afford them…You know, I thought her stuff we didn't need either.

Preston said these conversations "just didn't lead anywhere but getting mad at each other," so his wife mostly bought what she wanted and he generally abstained from making purchases. "I just didn't want to spend money if it was going to cause so much upset." Preston chose to give in to his wife for the good of the marriage instead of fighting about one another's spending priorities and perpetuating the conflict. It was not worth the stress. As he put it, "some things aren't worth an argument."

Hilda, 40, said that as much as she and her husband struggled to make ends meet, she did not say anything to her husband about his habit of "buying game books—*Dungeons and Dragons* books and things like that which cost $20 a book" because she accepted that he needed freedom to explore his own hobbies and interests. Besides, she said, buying books was better than the alternative: "I would rather that than have him hang out at the bar and come home drunk." Similarly, although they could not afford it, Amy, 34, came to terms with her husband's discretionary spending on concerts despite their financial struggles because "that's all he really does for fun, so I know that's really important to him and that's what he enjoys. So for the most part I don't give him too much of a hard time about it." Additionally, Manny, 37, said that as much as he wanted to talk with his wife about her tendency to overspend and pay bills late, he decided not to say anything because he did not think it was worth the aggravation. When he had previously addressed this issue they would argue and nothing would change. He said he used to get so stressed about finances that he "buried myself in the bottle." Manny explained that now, "My trying to keep up my sobriety, that's more of an issue than money is." Because he was concerned with keeping his anxiety low in order to avoid drinking, Manny did not make an issue of what he perceived as his wife's financial mismanagement. He realized that talking about it would escalate into a fight, and that he would turn to alcohol to cope. Because he wanted to be sober, he chose not to worry about finances, resigning himself that a late fee was a small price to pay for lowered anxiety.

Tailoring Communication

The final strategy participants and partners used to reduce financial uncertainty involved tailoring financial communication to their partners' needs—talking about finances in a way that resonated with their partner. Tailoring communication has been used during communication about uncomfortable issues (e.g., Romo & Donovan-Kicken, 2012) in order to respect the other person's beliefs and feelings. As Mike, 49, explained, when talking about money, "You gotta know the personality of your spouse. Some people can deal with it well, some people can't." Indeed, several participants discussed the importance of customizing communication to one's spouse in order to best negotiate finances together.

One way partners communicated was via logical, research-based communication. As Gary, 62, said, it was important to keep communication about finances "objective and factual. Don't get too wrapped up emotionally." Ellen, 48, explained that she and her husband were strategic about making financial decisions. "Both of us know that for either of us to accept spending on large amount ticket items, we've got to have some facts and figures before we even start the conversation." As Ellen said:

> We kind of made an agreement that, "Okay, yeah, you can have your argument for why we should spend it on this, and I will give my argument on why we shouldn't and why we should save"…And both of us have this instinct of wanting to be the boss and wanting to be in charge. And it's a bitch when we do home improvement projects 'cause he's wanting—you know, he's used to being in charge of those kind of things. We were refinishing our bathroom a few years ago, and goodness I was having ideas that I thought could make it a lot better, and he said, "Well, this is what I do for a living, *come on*, let me do this!" …So we've always, I think because we both have the instinct to be the boss or in charge, we've always got to make the other one prove that they should be the one to make that decision or to go with that or spend on that. So we've always kind of required each other, "Okay, this is the point you're making; you better have facts to support it," whether it's a project or spending or finances. Because I don't think both of us, neither one of us wants to just take the other one's word for it at face value…We respect each other's authority for certain things, but we also respect the fact that the other one knows that we're not just going to be a doormat, you know? You've got to know your stuff.

Implementing this strategy enabled Ellen and her husband to enact fact-based decisions that they could both accept because the choices were based on reason, not emotion. For example, she said that if she told her husband:

> "Okay, here's why we're saving. We're saving for this." And if I can show him, "This is what we're saving it for," or "This is why we should," "We can put it into there," and if I can show him how saving it in this particular fashion will benefit, usually he'll go along.

Similarly, other participants, such as Tom, 62, said that they and their partners also relied on reason-based explanations for expensive purchases. As Tom explained, because he spent more freely than his wife, he and his wife established a rule where he had to justify why he wanted to spend money on discretionary items such as a new gun or an expensive hunting trip. As he put it, "I always have to have my ducks lined up, whenever you approach her about anything like that, you know, it's not a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants moment." He had to plan in advance and strategically convince his wife that it made sense to spend money on costly purchases:

> It's always "Why?" when it comes to buying things and I think that's the way it should be. Take a couple that have only been married a couple years, maybe the trust isn't there; I don't know. But I have explicit trust in her thoughts when it comes to finances, absolutely. She tends to see the big picture and I may be intent on the moment, where she's got the big picture. "Okay, if you do this or if we do this, this will be the result." "Oh, I didn't think about that." And there are times when the roles are reversed.

Tom did not resent this rule because he believed that his wife had the family's financial interests at heart and that if he was not logically able to make a case, he probably should not be spending money. Similarly, Tammy, 31, explained that when she or her husband wanted to spend money on something the other partner did not think was necessary, they rationally discussed whether they could afford it. She explained: “[We] talk it out, try to do the pros and cons of, ‘Yeah, do I really need it? Does he really need it? Can we hold off on it?’” Making purchases reason-based eliminated the risk of foolish spending while reducing face threat. If a purchase was rejected it was because it was not logically needed or did not fit the budget or financial plan; it was not an attack or judgment on the person who wanted the item. As Tom, 62, explained, “You can’t argue with logic.”

Indeed, one way Lori, 57, and her partner negotiated finances when her partner wanted to buy a discretionary item was that Lori provided budget-based reasoning, allowing the budget to speak for her. In this way, the emotion was removed and the conversation was based on logic. As Lori reasoned:

> I just tell her, “Well, this is what we’ve got; this is what we have to pay. We don’t really have the money for that; do you still want to do it?” And usually she’ll say, “No, let’s save the money.” Once in a while she’ll say, “Well, are you sure we can’t do it?” I say, “Well, looking at the budget there’s a possibility we could do it and something will come in so that it would take care of our spending that.” So in that case we may go ahead and do it but if that’s really not going to happen, then no, we can’t, we’ve gotta save.

Participants said that sticking to facts and reason also prevented discussions from getting too heated. Indeed, Heather, 46, stated she was finally able to convince her husband to reduce his retirement contributions by laying out an argument on paper and physically showing him the tax penalty they incurred from his over contributing. Heather said that her husband was a visual person, “so I thought seeing it all, and seeing it in dollars and cents in black and white, it would finally like get through to him what I was trying to say rather than lecturing him and talking to him.”

Not all participants relied on their partner's sense of reason, however. A few participants found that appealing to emotion was more effective in curtailing their partners' spending and avoiding arguments. For example, Kim, 26, and Mike, 49, referenced their children during financial discussions. As Kim explained, "I usually say, 'Well, okay, if you want this video game, which kid's gonna go without?' You know, and that usually [prompts a response of] 'Oh, well, yeah, we don't want them to go without,'" and her husband avoided purchasing the game, which reduced her uncertainty about his overspending. Similarly, Mike said that when he talked with his wife about spending less money and not running up charges on the credit card he told her that she needed to cut back for the sake of their children. As he recalled, he said, "Stop spending money or slow down spending money. We need to, you know, take a step back from this a little bit. Um, you know, we gotta provide for the kids."

In addition, participants reported that they and their partner customized financial communication by working through conflict in a way that best resonated with one another. Participants talked about the importance of avoiding accusations and/or yelling in working out financial difficulties. Charmaine, 45, said that it took 19 years before she learned what was successful in resolving financial disagreements with her husband—civility.

> I mean, you really have to be calm, and you have to not raise your voice because once you raise your voice, then both voices, they just keep getting higher. But you have to be able to see it, not only your point of view but the other person's….I would stop and think about how it would affect him or how I thought he felt about it, then I would just ask him how would he feel if it was him in my shoes. And then it makes him think about it, and it made me think

> about it. And it's not accusing. To me, it's not anyway. And we seem to get through it that way.

Charmaine stated that if she was confrontational with her husband or he was confrontational with her, they would both "shut down" and their problems would go unresolved. Similarly, Mike, 49, said:

> You just can't yell. Once you get yelling you lose any constructive conversation and you just start hating each other. You just…you become spiteful, you know? "I'll show you," you know? You don't want to become spiteful.

Participants said it was important to treat partners with respect, even when their views about financial decisions did not align. As Tom, 62, stated, when he and his wife disagreed, he reasoned that, "She may be seeing something I am not seeing," and they proceeded to talk about finances in a "very congenial way." As Tom explained:

> If you are going to discuss something with anyone it does no good to go into the discussion with a negative attitude or any kind of a preconceived notion. [My wife] opens my eyes and I open her eyes…We talk about it, we discuss it. It doesn't do any good to get upset about something.

Another way some participants tailored communication was by deliberately talking about finances in a setting and at a time that was most conducive for them to hold a meaningful discussion. For example, Tammy, 31, said that she and her husband "just pick an evening when, you know, we're alone or the kids are asleep or gone or whatever, and we'll just pull out the bills that are due and go from there." Heather, 46, explained that she and her husband "talk best…Saturday morning, when we're in bed and we don't have anywhere to go so we're nice and relaxed. Then we can converse about those things—the tough subjects." In this way, a calm, distraction-free environment facilitated meaningful money conversations.

MAINTAINING UNCERTAINTY

Not all participants sought to reduce uncertainty. While less common, some participants seemed content with their current level of financial uncertainty. Because they preferred the ambiguity to the alternative (certainty), they did not seek to reduce their uncertainty. For these participants, uncertainty was preferable to a “negative certainty” (Brashers, et al., 2000, p. 73). Consequently, participants sought to maintain ambiguity by avoiding thoughts and/or information that could decrease their uncertainty, similar to emotion-focused coping, in which people regulate how they feel about a stressor. Emotion-focused coping is used to “maintain hope and optimism, to deny both fact and implication, to refuse to acknowledge the worst, to act if what happened did not matter, and so on” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 151). One component of emotion-focused coping is avoidance, which can “shield people from information that is overwhelming and distressing and can provide escape from a distressing certainty by maintaining uncertainty” (Brashers, 2001, p. 483). In the literature, avoidance has also been enacted by people who do not want to know potentially distressing or overwhelming health information, as in the case of genetic testing (e.g., Wahlin, 2007) or HIV test results (Brashers et al., 2000). This finding has also applied to social network members who choose to maintain uncertainty about their loved ones’ communication-debilitating illness or injury by avoiding negative information about it (Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008) as well as people who prefer to sustain uncertainty about the state of their post-divorce family, by avoiding communication about these topics (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003).

With respect to financial uncertainty, because Hilda, 40, was unsure how to go about selling her home, she avoided talking about the situation in an attempt not to face the certainty of her dismal housing situation. As she put it:

> When topic[s] like this come up I shut down and I get all frustrated and panicky and I don't want to talk about it….I like to keep my worries to myself because it's like the "ostrich effect:" if you don't talk about it, it doesn't exist.

By metaphorically burying her head in the sand with respect to thinking about her unsold property, Hilda was trying to maintain her current state of ambiguity. Similarly, Amy, 34, stated that she and her husband avoided talking about money because the topic was just too upsetting to discuss. As she explained:

> It's definitely gotten more stressful to talk about money. I think we just try not to talk about it too much because, gosh, I don't want to have to fight about money. I really don't and I've always appreciated that we didn't have to.

Amy and her husband preferred to remain uncertain about finances versus acknowledging their dismal financial status and forcing themselves to confront a depressing and stressful certainty.

Other participants intentionally removed themselves from financial uncertainty-producing events or shielded themselves from information in order to maintain their current uncertainty levels. For instance, Kathy, 57, said she avoided any interaction regarding her family's stocks "so I don't have to worry about it." She did not want to be involved because it was too distressing for her to be aware of the performance of their investments. She was happy for her husband to handle the investments. As she explained:

> There's things I don't make him worry about, so it's kind of the finances are just in that area for the stocks and stuff. That's his thing; I don't like 'em. If I had my choice I'd take all my money out of the stocks and I would put them in a savings account because it's safer. We've lost a ton of money two different times, and that was my first inclination: cash them in and pay the penalty, and put them in a saving account. And no, he's Mr. "No, let's ride it out and we'll gain it back," and

> he's right, but we could have had $80,000 the one time that we don't have any more.

Because their money had fluctuated so drastically in the stock market, Kathy chose to trust her husband with investments because the uncertainty was more desirable than encountering the possible certainty of learning that their investments had declined in value. In order to maintain her uncertainty she avoided conversations about the performance of their stocks.

Steve, 68, on the other hand, was unique in that he maintained financial uncertainty because he appeared to enjoy it. For example, he thrived on the ambiguity involved in not possessing traditional 401(k)s but relying on his rental properties as extra income. As he explained, "Where people have 401(k)s and they draw them…I don't personally have a 401(k), I manage all of my own funds. And I utilize my rental properties for um, for my additional income. And uh, it's more exciting that way." He described himself as a "spinning top" who acted quickly on financial matters. He said, "I'm a really unorthodox person… [Compared to my wife] I'm a little more adventurous. As a matter of fact I just bought a house, which I shouldn't have bought, two weeks ago. I told her we were thinking about buying it and then we got it, and it was a frenzy." Although Steve acknowledged that he was worried about the economy and its effects on his business, at the same time he seemed to enjoy the excitement and unpredictability of the economy and sought to maintain his current uncertainty levels by continuing to engage in uncertainty-producing activities.

ADAPTING TO UNCERTAINTY

Similar to chronically-ill people who perceived uncertainty as an indelible part of life and adapted to the ongoing uncertainty in which they were faced (e.g., Mishel, 1990), some participants, largely those who were financially-struggling, shared ways in which they were able to adapt to their uncertain reality. In alignment with the ways in which people with chronic medical conditions cope with uncertainty (e.g., Brashers, 2001, 2006; Mishel, 1990), several participants in the current study reassessed financial uncertainty as something that was no longer negative but a fact of life. Although they were unable to achieve financial predictability in life, these participants were able to cope with the constant uncertainty of making ends meet through such strategies as relying on religion, learning to juggle bill payments, and seeing the big picture. By modifying their mindset and decision making through adaptation, the participants reframed their appraisal of uncertainty from threat to hope (Mishel, 1990).

Relying on Religion

Similar to the strategies used by people whose spirituality helped them adapt to uncertainty in chronic illness (e.g., Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty et al., 2004), several participants in the current study relied on their existential beliefs. These individuals spoke of turning to a higher power to manage finances by "giving it to God." These participants accepted that God controlled their financial fate. April, 36, said that for the first half of her marriage, managing finances used to be "a lot more stressful…I used to want to really have major control over it in my mind and my senses." As she recounted, "I think my focus probably when I was working was more education, savings, having control over everything that might happen, being prepared and being, you know, smart, and being structured." Despite her best efforts, however, her family was not getting ahead, which caused considerable stress, anxiety, anger, and arguments. After getting baptized and resigning from her job to stay home with her children, "I just kind of put it in God's hands," she explained. "I've been able to give up the control more; give it up to God and let God take care of it." April learned to be late on bills and came to peace with draining their emergency fund and savings in order to manage finances in a way that enabled her family to partake in shared activities and reduced her stress level.

Consistent with an adaptive strategy used by the chronically ill (Mishel, 1990), focusing on what she could control (daily tasks) versus worrying about future plans enabled April to cope with long-term uncertainty and allowed her and her family to enjoy life. As April said, "We're able to do things that other people might not be able to do that are on the same income. And I feel like that's just God's grace, you know?" Her strong faith enabled April to cope with chronic uncertainty, because she truly believed that God would always take care of her family. Belief in God released her from material pressures and provided her with the clarity to manage her finances in a less stressful way, with the reassurance that God would provide for them. Similarly, Heidi, 39, said that she and her husband relied on God to help them cope with economic hardship. As she put it:

> We just give it to God. We say, you know, "Okay, let's give it to God and see where he wants us to go." And that's what we do. Um, when I lost my last full-time job before this one it was four or five years ago. I came home and that's the first thing we said, "Okay, God didn't want me there for some reason. Let's move forward."

While April and Heidi both acknowledged that God was not solely responsible for their financial well-being (sound financial management was important, too; in fact, in referencing paying for their children's college education Heidi said, "we can't just sit here and expect [money for tuition] to land in our laps"), they insisted that God had a financial plan for their family. As Heidi stated, "You know, if it's meant to be He's going to make sure that we have it, and if it's not he's gonna make sure that we don't."

Charmaine, 45, said that she turned to prayer ("a lot of prayer, a lot of prayer") to help her and her husband negotiate their financial troubles. Because they did not know how to save for their daughters' college tuition, they put their worries in God's hands. As Charmaine explained, "We say we can't do anything. We don't worry really. I mean, worrying about it's not gonna change it, so we just pray about it and let it go." Charmaine and her husband accepted that there were some financial matters they could not control. She said that in order "to keep that stress level down, you can't be worrying about things you can't change." Similarly, Martin, 55, stated, "You know, God said, 'I will provide your needs.' And I truly believe it." Believing that God would take care of him helped Martin adapt to the challenges he faced in making ends meet. Faith and trust in God helped participants come to terms with chronic financial uncertainty and reconceptualize it as part of the "natural rhythm to life" (Mishel, 1990, p. 260), and an "inescapable part of reality" (Mishel, 1990, p. 261).

Learning to Juggle Bill Payments

Another way in which participants and their partners were able to adapt to chronic financial uncertainty involved learning how to juggle bill payments. Consistent with the notion that they simply could not control everything or completely change their financial circumstances, several participants came to terms with partially paying bills or pushing back bills in order to stay financially solvent As Lori, 57, explained:

> You get very creative, and some things you just hold off and say, "Okay, this is due here, this is due here, so we'll move this and pay this one and I'll hang on to this," and that week somebody is supposed to pay something and that'll take care of that and then you just keep doing that.

Even though participants trusted a higher power to take care of their families, they still had to figure out how to get by on a daily basis, and juggling bills accomplished this goal. April, 36, said it took some time to learn to "deal with floating payments and robbing Peter to pay Paul and just learning that process 'cause it's not something that I was naturally inclined to be like," but that once she learned how to maneuver bills and payments she felt much more comfortable about her family's financial situation.

Sometimes juggling bills involved making arrangements to postpone payments. As Kim, 26, explained, at the time of the study she and her husband were a month behind in paying their gas bill and they had to arrange a payment plan with the gas company:

> So we have to constantly call [the gas company] and [say], "Okay, we can't make it this day, but we can make a payment by this day." Just so that we know that, okay, we have enough for gas for [my husband] to get back and forth to work, we have enough for diapers and pull-ups and we need to make sure we have this much for food.

Charmaine, 45, explained that she also had to negotiate with companies to make partial payments:

> My health started going down… so that's when I thought, you know, you gotta think in your mind; you cannot worry, you cannot. You know, you can call these people and say, "This is my situation, and this is what I *can* do." You know…the smallest amount that you can pay, if you can pay something, you know; I mean they may not be happy with what you can pay, but as long as you're paying something… they'll work with you, most of the time.

Creative bill paying enabled participants to regain some control of their finances and manage their daily needs. In this way, learning how to juggle finances enabled participants who were living hand to mouth to adapt to chronic uncertainty.

Seeing the Big Picture

Related to the strategy of relying on religion was a sense from several participants that, as they adapted to the reality of their economic condition, they had become more focused on the big picture—focusing on living a quality but humble life. Their mindset had shifted from seeking money and materialistic goods to more strongly valuing time with family and friends. In this way, uncertainty enabled participants to create a new value system and they were able to grow as individuals (Mishel, 1999). As April, 36, said, as she came to terms with life after quitting her job and embracing God, her outlook shifted from one in which she yearned for complete control and felt pressure to meet society's expectations about "where [people] need to be and what they need to be doing" to doing the best she could through God's example. Relinquishing control also involved surrendering the pursuit of "keeping up with the Joneses." Martin, 55, said that in the past, consumed by wants, he had made himself a "slave to credit cards:"

> It was just like a ladder and the ladder kept getting taller, and at the bottom of the ladder was debt. Every step I took on the ladder, more debt because I was trying to rob Peter to pay Paul with all these loans. I wouldn't put the credit cards down. Or I wouldn't stop spending. Going to Chicago, taking this girl here, you know, I was a gigolo just running girls all over and all that. Trying to keep up with the Joneses. You know, living outside my means. I didn't have a budget.

Only after hitting "rock bottom" did Martin come to terms with the reality that he was always going to be low-income, and accepted his lifestyle. Because he had a college education as well as an advanced degree, he explained that:

> People look at me and they feel sorry for me. I say, "Don't feel sorry for me. I feel sorry for y'all. I don't want them bills you got. For toys." That's my

> perspective…I'm not going to have money make me hostage. I'm gonna live free. All money is not good money.

Martin explained that his mindset completely shifted from when he had money to the present day when he was poor, and that he was content with his current position in life. He learned what was important: family. As he put it:

> I'm grounded. I went through the cycle of keeping up with the Joneses. It's not important to me anymore. Once you get my age [55], you have a different value about it…You know, at my age my dream has been accomplished. I got a nice truck. I have stable residency. All I need is stable employment. I'm still hustling all [these] little nickel jobs, and this parade has passed me by... At some point in time you have to realize you're at your dream. You do! I mean, there's the end of the road sooner or later. This is where I want to live; this is where I want to be; this is where I'm going to raise my kids; this is where the grandkids are going to come visit me…At my age, and the economy this tough, I'm satisfied.

Similarly, personal experiences made other participants realize that there was more to life than money and to accept chronic uncertainty. Lori, 57, said that as a child one of her younger sisters "got falling down drunk one night" and her father had to take her to the hospital. Because he ran out of gas they had to call an ambulance. Lori said that the first thing her dad told her sister was, "Do you know how much that ambulance ride cost me?" Lori said that that experience directly influenced her beliefs about money:

> Money is an important thing but it's not everything. There are some things in life that are more important than money, like people. Money is a nice thing to have; it's a good thing to get your bills paid, but above getting your bills paid, money isn't everything.

Relatedly, Francine, 43, said that she grew up financially comfortable, but in watching her father hoard his money she realized that money was not everything. In this way, she had accepted her low-income status, as being low income was preferable to approaching money like her father. As Francine explained:

> It's hard sometimes but then a lot of times I go with it. I've had clothes and shoes I've had for 10 years or more, and I just go with it. So I guess it's just, you know, watching my dad be selfish with his money and I'm not like that.

Kathy, 57, said that in discovering how to cut back and manage their finances, she and her husband learned that money was "kind of like a secondary thing." She said that "was a hard lesson to learn" but that they came to terms with the reality that they were always going to have to negotiate financial uncertainty. As she explained, financial uncertainty was inevitable:

> I think now, at our point in life, we're looking at realistically the rest of our life will be lean years between the economy and retirement and Social Security and that type of thing. So I think probably where we're at now is where we'll always be.

Resigning themselves to lives in which they will likely always confront financial struggles enabled participants to make peace with ongoing financial uncertainty. Indeed, consistent with the experiences of people managing chronic illness (Mishel, 1990), some participants in the current study came to view uncertainty as an "inescapable part of reality" in their lives (p. 261). These participants were able to adapt and cope via strategies that provided them with structure and stability despite the uncertainty with which they were faced (e.g., Brashers, 2006). Additionally, the uncertainty helped some participants find meaning in life (e.g., Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009), as they learned to value family and friends over material goods.

It is important to note that while low-income participants reported chronic financial uncertainty, participants who self-identified as middle class or "doing okay" also reported ongoing ambiguity. This is consistent with research that finds that 90% of Americans classify themselves as middle class (2% report that they are lower class and 9% say they are upper class; Meacham, 2012). Most participants in the current study described themselves as middle class even though in several cases their responses to interview questions and the demographic survey indicated that they were low income.

DISCUSSION

Because financial uncertainty emerged from the data as so salient, the second research question investigated the ways in which participants managed financial uncertainty. Whereas research indicates that finances can be a source of uncertainty in relationships (Knobloch, 2008), the ways in which people negotiate this uncertainty had not been explored previously.

As Bradac (2001) writes, "Certainly, in everyday life, subjective uncertainty about events and other people exists, waxing and waning as the world turns, but the question is: 'Can anything be done about it? More broadly, what do people do about it'" (p. 457)? The second research question uncovered that, consistent with the framework of UMT (Brashers, 2001), something can be done about financial uncertainty. Specifically, participants managed uncertainty via uncertainty reduction, maintenance, and adaptation, depending on the valence with which they appraised the uncertainty. Concordant with the principles of UMT, when it came to negotiating financial uncertainty, participants opted to reduce uncertainty (via information seeking, changing individual behavior, communally coping, and strategically communicating) if they viewed it as aversive. Participants maintained uncertainty if they preferred the ambiguity to a negative certainty, and adapted to uncertainty if they came to perceive it as a natural component of life, consistent with research on the chronically ill (e.g., Mishel, 1990).

The majority of participants negatively viewed uncertainty and sought to reduce it communicatively. UMT-framed research has consistently uncovered that people rely on information to reduce ambiguity and, in alignment with previous literature (e.g., Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008; Powell & Afifi, 2005), seeking information emerged as a major strategy for reducing uncertainty in the current study. Participants reduced uncertainty in part via the three possible ways suggested by UMT—active- and passive-information seeking and a reliance on experiential information (e.g., Brashers et al., 2003).

Some participants engaged in active-information seeking, in which they deliberately read articles about money, consulted financial advisors, and searched online for information in order to become better financially educated. For example, Donna, 63, called her broker to help her decipher her investment statements and Ellen, 48, and her husband conducted internet research to learn more about finances. Other participants partook in passive-information seeking, in which they encountered information via non-solicited interactions with others, such as receiving spontaneous advice from a neighbor or sibling (in the case of April, 36, and Kelly, 32), or by observing and learning from other people's finance-related experiences. For example, Edward, 71, used his friend's untimely death to reduce his uncertainty about whether he and his wife should save or spend; after his friend passed away Edward realized that he and his wife should travel while they were still healthy. The final way participants reduced their uncertainty through information was via experiential information. In this case, they relied on information garnered from previous hands-on experience with finances (for example, Jack, 68, was confident that after years of turning around hospitals, if he needed money he could call upon his financial expertise and start a business). Another element of experiential information involved prior financial socialization (indirect and direct interaction about finances); socialization emerged as a new type of experiential-information seeking behavior uncovered by this study.

An additional means of reducing uncertainty that surfaced in the present study was participants individually changing their own behavior. Participants reduced uncertainty through deliberate, individual efforts, including restricting personal discretionary expenditures (such as massages) in order to prepare for retirement, postponing retirement in order to continue receiving health insurance benefits, and avoiding sharing financial information with one's partner in order to minimize conflict or upset, akin to the notion of "protective buffering" (Coyne & Smith, 1991; 1994). For example, in order to reduce her uncertainty about the family's well-being, Maureen, 59, enacted a strategy of saving more money. In order to accomplish this goal, Maureen concealed the amount of money she had saved from her husband in order to prevent him from spending it. Pauleen, 69, reduced her uncertainty about her husband's family spending her life savings by concealing her resources from her husband. She reasoned that if he did not know how much money she had in her account, he would not brag to his family and her children would not receive her inheritance as she intended. These uncertainty-reduction behaviors involved individual decision making and communication techniques.

Participants were also able to reduce financial uncertainty was via communal coping (Afifi et al., 2006; Lyons et al., 1998), a new uncertainty-management strategy which emerged from the current study. Participants in this investigation commonly reported that they and their partners co-owned and collectively managed stressors via a variety of financial management strategies. Financial management involved partners collectively designating clear financial roles, devising a financial plan, establishing a budget, changing joint behavior, and developing purchasing rules. While research has examined the different ways in which participants manage money (with respect to separate versus joint accounts, e.g., Pahl, 1990; Treas, 1993), this study demonstrates that money management can be a deliberate way in which partners reduce uncertainty. For example, instead of arbitrarily establishing financial roles (e.g., bill payer, investor), participants recounted a sense that they collectively designated these roles based upon each other's strengths and interests in order to ensure that financial management would be handled by the most financially-equipped partner and that couples would be putting themselves in the best financial position possible.

Jointly devising a financial plan, as well as creating and managing a budget, served as prominent ways for many participants to reduce financial uncertainty and for couples to align their views regarding spending and saving. Additionally, establishing rules that partners needed to run purchases over a set dollar amount by each other before spending served as a common way for couples to manage their finances and respect one another. Also, deciding to deliberately change joint behaviors was a powerful way in which participants and partners took control of their finances in order to reduce uncertainty. Modifying behaviors involved both partners' intentional efforts to curtail spending in order to retire early, avoid eating out or traveling in order to save for their children's education, or purchase generic brands of food and clothing in order to provide themselves with a cushion in case of financial crisis.

Participants also reduced financial uncertainty via strategic communication, conceptualized as postponing conversations, picking battles, and tailoring communication to one another. In this way, participants and their partners used communication as a tool to accomplish financial management goals while minimizing conflict. For example, implementing a policy to “sleep on” decisions or delay conversations in order to allow partners to “cool off” or conduct additional research, emerged as effective ways to reduce uncertainty about financial decisions and minimize interpersonal conflict. Relatedly, participants talked of being strategic about picking battles and that sometimes it was best to let things go. This finding suggests that in order to successfully communicate about finances, couples need to occasionally defer to one another and accept that no one is going to get their way every time. In fact, some participants suggested that financial management should not be conceptualized as a battle or power struggle but as something essential to family well-being.

Participants also tailored their communication, a strategy which has been used during communication about other potentially uncomfortable issues (e.g., Romo & Donovan-Kicken, 2012) in order to convey respect for the other person’s beliefs and feelings. In the current study, tailoring involved adapting communication to the needs of one’s partner; for example, if a partner responded best to logic, making communication reason based (e.g., appealing to financial research or referring to the budget or a financial planner’s advice). Heather, 46, even used visuals to convince her husband to invest less money in retirement, because an illustration was more effective than verbal communication. Tailoring communication also involved treating partners with respect, not putting one another on the defensive, and being receptive to partners’ ideas. Participants also discussed the importance of avoiding accusations and/or yelling in working out financial difficulties. Talking about money in a relaxed setting, during a low-stress time, for example, in bed on a weekend morning, helped partners reduce uncertainty while minimizing conflict.

Although most participants in the current study extoled the virtues of financial communication in managing uncertainty, it is important to note that a few individuals reported that it was frustrating to talk about money with their partner and that financial communication could be depressing, especially when they had to ask partners for permission to spend money, or when financial conversations dominated their relationship, leaving little time for more enjoyable non-money related talk or activities. It is possible that because these participants perceived financial communication negatively, they were less inclined to engage in uncertainty reduction.

Indeed, uncertainty reduction was not always straight forward. Underscoring the uncertainty-reduction strategies that surfaced in the current study is a sense that participants, particularly as they managed uncertainty dyadically, were faced with having to negotiate multiple goals, consistent with the experiences of patients coping with illness and illness-related uncertainty (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000; Brashers et al., 2002). A multiple-goals perspective involves a sense that communication is strategic, whether and how people discuss topics is influenced by multiple interests and purposes, and messages can help people simultaneously accomplish more than one objective (e.g., Caughlin, 2010; Goldsmith, 2004; Goldsmith, Gumminger, & Bute, 2006). In executing uncertainty reduction strategies in the present investigation, participants such as Manny, 37, had to simultaneously determine how to accomplish their instrumental goal of effective financial management while meeting their relational goal of avoiding conflict and having a satisfying relationship with their partner. Some participants also wrestled with their own or their partner's identity goals. For example, Lori, 57, wanted to achieve financial stability while not depriving her partner of the financial items that made her feel happy or good about herself (which was particularly the case for participants who had grown up poor and were still financially struggling).

Previous research has indicated that it can be difficult to encourage a partner to engage in healthy behavior without running the risk of insulting their current efforts

(Goldsmith et al., 2006), demonstrating the dilemma between protecting a partner's identity and maintaining the relationship. By creating a financial plan together, or deliberately crafting messages and using communication that best addressed partners' needs, participants seemed largely able to accomplish instrumental goals of financial management while protecting their relationship and minimizing threats to their partner's face.

Some participants were so concerned about maintaining relational harmony while reducing financial uncertainty, however, that they changed their individual behaviors to avoid talking about financial issues with their partner or actively concealed information from them in order to minimize adverse relational effects, such as upsetting their partner, engaging in arguments, or becoming stressed, which in the case of Manny, 37, fueled his alcoholism. This use of topic avoidance is consistent with prior research identifying relationship protection as a motivation behind not discussing topics in close relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000) and is in line with research on concealment—namely that people strategically consider costs and benefits of a disclosure and conceal information when the risks outweigh the rewards (Petronio, 2002). Indeed, previous research examining parents' motivations to financially disclose to their children found that parents do not reveal such information when parents perceive it as inappropriate or too threatening to their children (Romo, 2011). Participants' desire to avoid arguments also supports research on conflict avoidance, staying clear of certain topics in order to prevent disagreements (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Roloff & Ifert, 2000).

Despite some participants' avoidance or concealment of money-related information with their partners in order to minimize conflict while reducing uncertainty, the data overwhelmingly support a sense that participants found talking with their partner about financial management and engaging in strategic problem-solving behavior beneficial. While some participants acknowledged difficulty in talking about finances initially, they reported that talking became less uncomfortable over time and was critical in managing their finances. Not only did working together to manage and communicate about money help participants and partners reduce uncertainty about finances, but several participants said such teamwork strengthened their relationship, enabling them to better manage financial-related arguments and conflict.

Although this study did not explicitly examine how uncertainty affected relational functioning, the ways in which participants managed uncertainty provides important insight into the role of financial uncertainty and conflict. Previous research has been mixed with respect to the ways in which economic adversity affects relationships. As the family stress model (Conger & Elder, 1994a) maintains, "Stressful events or conditions create strains or pressures in daily living" which affect behaviors and moods, which in turn influence well-being (p. 9). Additionally, financial uncertainty is negatively correlated with satisfaction and trust, suggesting that the more financial uncertainty couples report, the less satisfaction and trust they have in their relationship (Knobloch, 2008). However, the findings of the current study indicate that the presence of financial stress and uncertainty does not automatically mean that relationships are doomed and uncertainty cannot be managed.

Indeed, consistent with prior research that prosocial communication, partner support, and effective problem solving can possibly mediate the negative outcomes of financial stress and help families facing economic hardship become resilient (e.g., Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger, et al., 1999; Orthner et al., 2004; Voydanoff, 1990), the participants in the current study were largely able to manage their financial uncertainty by seeking information, changing their own behavior, communally coping, and strategically communicating, similar to the strategies uncovered by Elder et al. (1994).

By mapping out their finances together and being open with their communication, participants were able to reduce uncertainty and relational conflict. Because they had created financial decisions together, no one was to blame for the outcome.

While less common than uncertainty reduction, maintaining uncertainty also emerged in the current investigation. UMT posits that when people view uncertainty as desirable or preferable to certainty, they choose to maintain it (e.g., Brashers, 2001). This strategy has been supported in the literature by people who would rather not know such potentially disturbing information as the results of a genetic (e.g., Wahlin, 2007) or HIV test (Brashers et al., 2000), social network members who prefer to maintain uncertainty about their loved ones' communication-debilitating illness or injury (Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008), and people who choose to maintain uncertainty about the state of their post-divorce family by avoiding communication about these topics (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003).

In the current study, rather than reduce their uncertainty and risk becoming sure of something potentially aversive, some participants wanted to maintain their current state of uncertainty because they viewed it as preferable than the alternative (e.g., not knowing about investment performance was preferable than learning about the negative certain state of their investments and then worrying). Participants who maintained uncertainty were relatively content with their current state of ambiguity and generally avoided conversations or thoughts about uncertain events that caused them anxiety. For these participants, who had a higher tolerance for uncertainty, "ignorance [was] bliss" (Kellerman & Reynolds, 1990, p. 5).

On the other hand, similar to research examining uncertainty management among the chronically ill (e.g., Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty, Livneh, & Wilson, 2004; Mishel, 1990), several low-income participants learned to adapt to the ongoing uncertainty they faced due to their disadvantaged socioeconomic status. Participants in the current study relied on a higher power ("Giving it to God"), learned how to juggle bill payments (focusing on the here and now versus the future), and saw the big picture (there is more to life than money) to make peace with their economic condition.

With respect to turning to religion, April, 36, said that she put her finances "in God's hands. I've been able to give up the control more; give it up to God and let God take care of it." Relinquishing control to God helped participants adapt to uncertainty because they had faith that God had their family's best financial interest at heart and would be taking care of them. This belief took pressure off participants and allowed them to focus on meeting their basic needs versus worrying about the future. Giving up control "released" participants from stress, as April explained. Adapting to chronic uncertainty by turning to religion parallels the uncertainty management efforts undertaken by chronically-ill patients (e.g., Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty et al., 2004), suggesting that people facing chronic conditions learn to adapt in similar ways, as they come to terms with their limited control.

Consistent with handing control to God and acknowledging that they were never going to maintain complete control of finances involves the notion that chronically-low income participants adapted to uncertainty by learning how to juggle bill payments. Participants partially paid bills or delayed bill paying in order to make ends meet and effectively cope with ongoing financial uncertainty. Similarly, seeing the big picture (recognizing the importance of family and friends versus material items) enabled participants to come to terms with their chronic financial uncertainty. While they may have been rationalizing their current financial status, several participants reported they had no desire to be rich and that they were happy to be free of material excesses. It is possible that for these individuals, the trappings of wealth were simply not (or no longer) appealing, as participants preferred having more time to spend with family and living simpler lives. In fact, some participants recounted adverse consequences of having more money (e.g., such as Manny's alcoholism). As Lori, 57, said, "Money is an important thing but it's not everything. There are some things in life that are more important than money, like people." Martin, 55, said that he was no longer concerned with buying flashy cars and going into debt because he had finished trying to keep up with the Joneses and had learned from his mistakes. April mentioned that her family would have had more assets had she not quit her job to stay home with the children, and the family would have been better off financially if her husband had accepted a number of higher-paying job offers. But she was content with their life and said that her family had "been blessed."

In part because many chronically-uncertain participants had lessened their desire for material goods, they were able to make peace with being low income. Through the flexibility and open-mindedness involved in adaptation, participants were able to find security in the here and now. In this way, participants were able to cope with uncertainty.

Chapter Seven: Results: Barriers to Uncertainty Management (RQ3)

UMT (Brashers, 2001) posits that as much as people may want to manage their uncertainty, not everyone is successful in accomplishing this goal (e.g., Brashers, 2006). Uncertainty may prevent people from coping with situations if the individuals do not know how what to say or do. This study's third and final research question explored the obstacles some participants faced in negotiating uncertainty. These participants' success in negotiating financial uncertainty was hindered by information barriers, time management barriers, sociocultural barriers, and/or communication barriers. These obstacles are similar to the information barriers identified in the uncertainty literature (e.g., Babrow & Kline, 2000; Brashers, 2001; Brashers et al., 2002) and the general barriers to coping identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Isolating these barriers provides insight into the difficulties participants in the present investigation faced in managing uncertainty.

INFORMATION BARRIERS

Sometimes, as much as people would like to reduce their uncertainty, information may be inadequate. There may be a shortage or an overload of information, or the information needed to reduce uncertainty may not exist, making such a decline in uncertainty unlikely or impossible (Babrow & Kline, 2000). These circumstances applied to some participants in the present investigation.

Consistent with national data that finds that just 28% of adults view their financial literacy as very good or better (Godsted & McCormick, 2007) and 40% of adults rate their personal finance knowledge as a C, D, or F (Cunningham, 2012), several participants in the current study reported lacking the financial information and confidence necessary to manage various types of financial uncertainty. Charmaine, 45, said that with respect to figuring out how to save for their children's college tuition, she and her husband "don't have a solution" as they were already living paycheck to paycheck and did not know what they could do to save. Lee, 36, said that he and his wife "both just sort of bumble and stumble" through their finances because they were unsure how to manage money. Similarly, Amy, 34, explained that both she and her husband lacked financial knowledge and that they were "kind of…two dummies hooking up."

This dearth of financial acumen commonly was the result of a shortage of financial socialization. While some participants, such as Ernie, 69, reported receiving no financial knowledge from their parents (as he explained, "there was no conversation about money 'cause there wasn't any"), Ernie was able to become financially successful despite his lack of financial socialization, making him very much the exception. A common barrier to participants' uncertainty management involved participants receiving a paucity of financial information from their parents. Some participants reported their parents actively keeping finances a secret from them, while others said their parents just never talked about money. Jane, 36, mentioned that while her middle-class parents taught her about money, her partner, who grew up in a low-income family, received no financial education. She said that in today's society, "It's a privilege to know how you can be responsible with money… I think that it's a shame because I think people should have that education." Heather, 46, said her parents did not discuss money matters with her, although she was quite cognizant that her family was poor. As she explained:

> With my parents it was more like an awareness than that they ever talked to me. It was more like I was really aware that we didn't have money by seeing what other kids had and did. Seeing what I wore as compared to them—the jokes and teasing and stuff like that, you know, shopping at Goodwill for clothes… [My mom]

said that she really knew that she didn't know much [about money] so she felt like she really wasn't the best to teach us because she didn't know herself.

Because Heather's mother was unknowledgeable about finances, she did not talk with Heather about money, which put Heather at a financial disadvantage when it came to managing her own finances as an adult. Relatedly, Amy, 34, said that neither her nor her husband's family communicated with them about finances because their families "didn't know how to manage money" themselves. Amy stated that because she and her husband did not learn financial basics they did not know what to discuss once they married and have since struggled to manage financial uncertainty. As she explained:

> We didn't talk about [finances] because we didn't know what to talk about. You know, we talked about who was going to pay what, and when, um, you know. We thought we were doing a good job. But then when it came down to it, like you know, retirement, things like that, we didn't know what we didn't know. So had we talked more and realized we didn't know enough, maybe we would've sought help sooner…. It's very strange, people, at least in my family, in [my husband's] family, we weren't encouraged to learn a lot about financial independence and financial resources. Um, and you know, no one teaches you that kind of thing in school, so you've really got to seek it out on your own. And I mean if you've never thought about that, you wouldn't know to do that.

Amy attributed her and her husband's financial mistakes to their parents' lack of financial socialization. Similarly, Charmaine, 45, reported that her parents did not talk with her at all about finances. As she explained, she wished they had taught her the foundations of saving:

> If you have money, you've got a steady income, pay yourself. Save as much as you possibly can…I mean that is so important….there are many times when I

> wish that I knew how to handle my money better, and I'm learning that, but I wish I already knew before it got to where I *had* to learn…And I had nobody to teach me.

Participants who did not learn about money as children said that they were committed to teaching their own children about financial management. As Amy, 34, explained:

> I was just thinking the other day about how I want [my children] to be way more informed than I ever was and still am. And so as I learn stuff I'm planning on teaching it to them so they don't end up like me.

Similarly, Lee, 36, said that "even though [my wife and I] don't have our [financial] act together 100% doesn't mean that we can't teach our kids to do that." He had already begun teaching their three-and-a-half year-old daughter about the importance of monetary value because he did not want her to repeat his financial mistakes. That these parents were open (or planned to be open) with their children about financial matters in order to provide them with more opportunities or prevent them from making poor financial choices is consistent with motivations behind parent-child financial disclosure to (Romo, 2011).

Information was not only a barrier to uncertainty management due to a dearth of financial socialization. Other participants reported that, due to the unpredictable nature of the economy, the lack of reliable financial information available (for example, how to make money in the stock market) prevented them or their partners from managing uncertainty about their investments, because there was no guarantee how well stocks and bonds would perform. Another barrier facing participants was a lack of information about their life span, which prevented them from knowing how to best save for retirement. As Bob, 63, said, because he and his wife didn't have a "crystal ball" that could tell them how long they were going to live, they were unsure how much money they should be investing. Only one participant (Amy) mentioned that the existence of financial information had actually increased uncertainty about her economic security, due to information overload. Amy said, “I was just reading they’re going to cut the amount of time you can be on unemployment, and that stressed me out…I gotta stop reading stuff because I find out information that just keeps stressing me out.” In this way, communication itself can be a source of uncertainty (Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008; Goldsmith, 2009).

TIME MANAGEMENT BARRIERS

Competing demands for limited resources inhibited some participants’ ability to manage financial uncertainty. One of the main obstacles was a shortage of time. Amy, 34, said that she realized that she and her husband should be handling their money better, but that they were hindered by a lack of time. As Amy explained:

> We’re not out spending lots of money, but I mean…clipping coupons or really bargain shopping, we don’t have a lot of time for those kinds of things. We’re really busy, so we always say we should bargain shop. Is it cheaper to drive to [a town 20 miles away], shop at [the discount grocery store], save money, or is it cheaper to stay in [the local town] and even though the prices are higher at [the local grocery store], but you save the gas money. So we should look into those things, but we don’t. We don’t take the time.

Amy said that she and her husband did not have the time to research ways in which saving money could become a reality. Similarly, Megan, 33, said that she lacked the time to think about finances or discuss financial worries with her partner because she was too busy with her job:

> I don't ever have time…I'm in and out, in and out, in and out all the time. I go to [a town 30 miles away], and I go to [a town 45 miles away], and then I go to [a town 20 miles away]. 'Cause if I have to ship out an order I get it out of my house and then go real quick.

Because life was so frenetic, several participants said they simply did not have the time to sit down and think strategically about financial planning. This lack of time prohibited them from effectively negotiating their financial uncertainty.

SOCIOCULTURAL BARRIERS

A few participants' uncertainty management was limited in part due to sociocultural barriers, consistent with the personal constraints against coping identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). For example, April, 36, said that one of her biggest worries was whether she would have enough money each month to feed her family of eight. As she put it, "Sometimes it can be stressful. Today's Tuesday, so we have $80 'til next Friday, a week 'til next Friday… eight days away. So we have all our food bought, that's the only thing I'm ever concerned about." Despite her uncertainty about the family food budget, because her husband was raised on Food Stamps, he did not want the family to use them, even though they qualified for public assistance. As April explained:

> You know, we don't get Food Stamps or anything like that, but I'm always concerned. We're eligible for Food Stamps, but because he grew up on Food Stamps he will not…and I come from a totally different background where like, you know, there's a stigma attached to Food Stamps, but now, it's reversed. He's like, "I will not get Food Stamps!" and I'm like, "Well, shoot, we could use Food Stamps!"

April's husband's background prevented her from managing her uncertainty about food. Additionally, Charmaine, 45, said that because her husband felt like he should be taking care of the family, he did not want her to take on a second job to help make ends meet:

> I'm thinking about getting another job, two jobs, and he keeps telling me I can't. I mean, he doesn't want me to get two jobs. And I don't know when I would fit in another job, but, you know, I'm thinking I should be able to do something.

Although bringing home an extra paycheck would help reduce their financial uncertainty, Charmaine's uncertainty management was stymied because getting a job likely threatened her husband's personal values (and the cultural expectation of men as providers; Prince, 1993).

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Last, some participants attributed their inability to manage their uncertainty to a lack of understanding of how to communicate about finances with their partners. As Lee, 36, explained:

> I think that on many levels because of how sheltered of an existence I had growing up as a child, I still feel like I'm in recovery mode. I still feel like I wasn't given the tools necessary to figure out how to get through what I need to get through, especially with interpersonal communication. You know, [my parents] didn't talk about things like that. If they did, it was behind closed doors, so you never heard it. Almost that concept of [money] is taboo, you know, so I never learned how to deal with those really tough topics. You just…didn't do it.

Lee said that this lack of financial communication acumen prevented him and his wife from managing their uncertainty and getting ahead.

Further, Claire, 25, explained that her partner's financial mindset of always wanting and buying the "latest and coolest stuff" instead of saving money was their largest source of conflict and that she did not know how to effectively convince him to spend less. She said their conversations were like a "broken record" and involved "him complaining that he has no money, and me telling him if he didn't spend on as much stuff then he'd have more money." She said she tried not to nag her partner about overspending, because she did not want him to "feel bad," and "I don't want to be his mom. I'm not your keeper. I'm not in charge of your life…" but that ultimately his behavior affected her. "In the end I'm the one that's going to have to give him money if he needs money. So it impacts me too." In fact, at the time of the interview, Claire said that her partner was already broke and asking her to borrow money, even though it was only the fourteenth of the month. Claire said that she worried about his overspending because:

> I don't want to be poor. I don't want to not have enough money to not pay my bills… I went to school for a long time to have the job that I have, and I don't want to make money and have to spend it on what he wants to spend it on and have to worry. I don't want to have to worry.

As they had begun talking about marriage at the time of the study, Claire was even more uncertain about how they were going to negotiate their finances, particularly their financial differences. She said, "He doesn't want to be poor either but he doesn't want to not buy things, so it's kind of a lose-lose there." As much as Claire had attempted to talk with her partner, he had not changed his ways, and she did not know what to do or how to manage her uncertainty regarding his spending. Because she did not know how to effectively talk with him about his spending habits, they were at an impasse.

DISCUSSION

The third research question identified barriers to uncertainty management faced by participants. An understanding of these obstacles is critical in order to understand what impedes people from developing uncertainty management skills. After all, such expertise will enable people to improve their lives (Brashers, 2006). Concordant with existing research (e.g., Babrow & Kline, 2000; Brashers, 2001; Brashers et al., 2002), as much as some participants sought to manipulate their uncertainty, they were unable or unsuccessful due to inadequate information. This study also uncovered additional uncertainty-management barriers, similar to those identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as impediments to coping: time barriers, sociocultural barriers, and/or communication barriers. These obstacles are important to isolate because they provide practical insight into what prevents people from negotiating their uncertainty, providing a more holistic look at the uncertainty and financial management process.

Some participants acknowledged an inability to negotiate financial uncertainty because information was lacking, either because participants personally did not possess the financial acumen necessary to soundly manage their finances, information was inadequate (e.g., it was impossible for participants to know when they were going to die, which served as a barrier for their retirement planning), or, in the case of Amy, 34, information overload (through exposure to too much information about unemployment, which overwhelmed her) actually increased her uncertainty. Information overload is consistent with the finding that communication can be both a source of uncertainty and a means to manage it (e.g., Donovan-Kicken & Bute, 2008; Goldsmith, 2009).

Additional obstacles involved a shortage of time, sociocultural barriers, and inadequate communication skills. Participants such as Megan, 33, and Amy, 34, said they knew they should figure out a way to manage their finances, but they were simply too busy making ends meet to take the time to really think about a financial plan, engage in comparison shopping, or clip coupons. Other participants spoke of sociocultural barriers that prevented them from managing their uncertainty—for example, a partner's refusal to accept Food Stamps even though the family was eligible and Food Stamps would reduce financial uncertainty, because he grew up on Food Stamps and likely did not want to experience that shame, or a husband's belief that his wife should not take on two jobs because doing so would threaten his identity as provider. Deficient communication skills emerged as another obstacle to uncertainty management. Participants who lacked communication skills were unable to effectively talk about money with their partners, which prevented them from managing their financial uncertainty. Because these participants lacked interpersonal skills and were unsure how to talk with their partner, they were unable to develop or incorporate uncertainty management strategies.

Knowledge of the uncertainty barriers that surfaced in the current study is helpful in understanding factors that can impede people's negotiation of financial uncertainty and in explaining why people may struggle to manage their finances. Despite most individuals' desire to manage their uncertainty, the fact that they may lack information, time, or communication skills, or be restricted by sociocultural influences suggests that if people are to improve their financial and possibly relational well-being, efforts should be made to help people address—and overcome—these road blocks. In particular, government aid should be de-stigmatized, it should become more acceptable for both men and women to be equally committed to providing for their families, and couples should be provided with financial literacy and communication skills training.

Chapter Eight: General Discussion

Uncertainty is an inherent part of life, arising whenever circumstances are perceived to be unpredictable, ambiguous, complex, or information is lacking or unreliable (Brashers, 2001). Finances are known to be a cause of uncertainty for married couples (Knobloch, 2008) and a particular source of concern for families experiencing both objective and subjective economic hardship (e.g., Conger & Elder, 1994a; Papp et al., 2009). People are faced with financial decisions every day that affect not just themselves but their partners and their relationships. Because money is critically important for survival, stress and anxiety surrounding money can be high (e.g., Conger & Elder, 1994a). However, despite interdisciplinary research on Americans' financial illiteracy, the financial roles partners play in relationships, the prevalence of financial conflict, and parent-child communication, little communication research exists about how people actually discuss and manage financial uncertainty. As Conger and Elder (1994a) maintain, Americans "need to become more capable of adapting successfully to economic uncertainty and change" (p. 4). This study elucidated this process of negotiation and adjustment, providing valuable insight into tangible actions and strategies people can enact to manage uncertainty.

Using data gleaned from semi-structured interviews and framed by Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT; Brashers, 2001), this investigation provided unique and valuable insight into the types of financial uncertainty (economic, personal, family, communication, and chronic) faced by diverse participants in married or cohabiting relationships. The study also uncovered the extent to which participants were (un) able to negotiate this uncertainty via uncertainty reduction, maintenance, and adaption as well as the information, time management, sociocultural, and communication barriers some individuals encountered.

Just as cancer has “implications for the whole of a person’s life” (Shaha et al., 2008, p. 62), so do finances. Unlike the ambiguity that stems from other conditions (e.g., illness, adoption) this study finds that financial uncertainty is largely universal and must be negotiated communicatively regardless of participants’ age, socioeconomic status, sex, and family background. From the chronically poor to the self-described “rich,” participants from all walks of life and financial statuses reflected the financial uncertainty they were experiencing at the time of the study. Taken together, the findings of the investigation’s three research questions illuminate not only the specific types of financial uncertainty experienced by diverse participants but the ways in which participants are (un) able to manage this uncertainty, oftentimes in tandem with their romantic partner. In contrast to existing, limited research that uncovered financial uncertainty as one of several ambiguities faced by married couples (Knobloch, 2008), the current study focused exclusively on the financial uncertainty which emerged inductively from the interviews, providing in rich detail what this ambiguity looks like and how it was (not) negotiated. This chapter details the study’s theoretical contributions to UMT as well as practical applications that may help people effectively manage financial uncertainty.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The current investigation supports the tenets of UMT (Brashers, 2001)—that many sources and forms of uncertainty exist (Hogan & Brashers, 2009) and that uncertainty is not fundamentally aversive but a psychological state in which meaning is generated from the negative, positive, or neutral ways in which it is appraised (Brashers, 2001; Brashers et al., 2000). This study also found that, consistent with UMT, communication emerged as the fundamental means in which participants negotiated ambiguity. Participants who were able to manage uncertainty used information to reduce, maintain, or adapt to it. Conversely, a lack of communication skills surfaced as a major barrier to uncertainty negotiation.

As much as the study reinforces UMT, its findings also suggest several ways in which the original theory can be extended. Specifically, the results underscore the importance of expanding the theory to account for the role of the dyad as well as cultural and individual influences that emerged as inherent in uncertainty management. While UMT is a valuable and practical theory (Brashers, 2001) and much more nuanced than previous uncertainty frameworks (Brashers, 2006), a concerted focus on proximal and distal factors could strengthen the theory's contributions and broaden its reach.

Value of Dyadic Uncertainty Management

Although UMT's eighth principle states that "Gathering information is often a social process, and includes collaborators in an individual's social network" (Hogan & Brashers, 2009, p. 48), most existing UMT-framed research has focused on the ways in which people manage uncertainty individually (Goldsmith, 2009), occasionally relying on others for social support (e.g., Brashers, 2001, 2006; Brashers et al., 2000). Social support encompasses providing uncertain individuals with direct and indirect assistance in gathering and evaluating information, helping them develop new skills, and making them feel accepted and validated (Brashers et al., 2004). Social support also involves the recognition that either the stressor is shared and one person bears ultimate responsibility for managing the stress, or both people manage the stress but the problem belongs to one person (Lyons et al., 1998).

Unique to the current study, instead of merely turning to their romantic partner for assistance in reducing financial uncertainty or managing ambiguity via information gathering, many participants relied on their spouse to *jointly* manage financial uncertainty. In this way, the investigation finds that the role of one's partner can be important in negotiating uncertainty. The notion of dyadic uncertainty management recently emerged as a theoretical concept that underscores the need to consider the role that partners jointly play in managing uncertainty and to overcome UMT's "individualistic bias" (Goldsmith, 2009, p. 205). Yet, to date, dyadic uncertainty management has not been systematically explored. The current study provides valuable new insight into the ways in which people can manage financial ambiguity dyadically using communal coping—a sense that both partners co-own and are mutually responsible for reducing financial uncertainty (Lyons et al., 1998). For instance, for many participants in the current study, financial uncertainty-related stressors were not viewed as merely one partner's problem (even if couples possessed separate financial accounts) but both of their responsibilities (Lyons et al., 1998). For instance, even though only one partner had been laid off or was planning to retire, it was common for both partners to co-own and assume responsibility for the stressor, working together to manage the problem and reduce uncertainty collectively. Edna, 67, even spoke of the emotional contagion (Coyne, 1976) she experienced from her husband's anxiety, a tangible manifestation of the way in which she co-owned his uncertainty.

Goldsmith (2009) has called upon scholars to explore what motivates dyadic uncertainty management and how couples use communication and develop strategies for its use. In this investigation, communal coping emerged as a distinctive and prominent strategy that enabled participants and partners of all income levels and sexes to reduce uncertainty dyadically, consistent with the finding that members of post-divorce families engage in communal coping by jointly addressing problems (e.g., a reduction in finances) through family problem solving, direct confrontation of stressors, and managing stress through communication (Afifi et al., 2006). Perhaps due to the unique nature of finances within a cohabiting or married relationship—as a couple's financial well-being depends on both partners regardless of how their money is managed—many participants reported that they and their partners co-owned and negotiated financial uncertainty together. Similar to post-divorce life, in which multiple family members face a variety of minor and major stressors that they must negotiate collectively for the good of the family (Afifi et al., 2006), participants in the current investigation likely engaged in communal coping in part due to necessity—both for their fiduciary and relational well-being.

As uncertainty comes in many forms, with appraisals ranging from positive to negative, not all people who seek to manage uncertainty will engage in dyadic efforts. The use of dyadic management appears to be shaped by the valence and potential ramifications of the uncertainty; if uncertainty is evaluated negatively and will likely have nefarious effects not only for the individual but for others, a reliance on dyadic uncertainty management seems more likely. In the case of the present investigation, understanding the role that one's partner plays in uncertainty management was critical, as communal coping served as an effective way to help participants achieve financial goals. The current study found that through communal coping, participants established clear financial roles for one another, devised a financial plan, established a budget, changed joint financial behavior, and developed purchasing rules, engaging in active engagement as they jointly tackled the uncertainty (Coyne & Smith, 1991, 1994). This investigation offers empirical support for conceiving of uncertainty management as both individualistic and dyadic or communal in nature and uncovers a richer sense of the uncertainty management process.

Indeed, many participants who engaged in communal coping not only reported predominately effective uncertainty management (and better financial outcomes) but less fighting over money. Bradbury et al. (2001) assert that too often, marriage is viewed as adversarial but that by approaching life as a team, couples can better manage their conflict, as supported by the current study's findings. As Bradbury et al. explain:

> A shift in the way we think about marriage—from conceiving spouses not as natural adversaries who must be taught to manage their differing needs and preferences but as a team, with assets and liabilities, that must adapt to a complex set of tasks and situations in order to sustain their marriage and family—may lead us to improve models of how marriages fail and to enhance the interventions that can be devised to modify marital outcomes (p. 76).

The current study suggests that by managing uncertainty together and viewing themselves as a collective unit (versus "alpha and beta dogs," in the words of Tom, 62), couples can achieve both positive financial management and relational outcomes. This notion is consistent with research that suggests that dyadic coping is positively associated with marital quality (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006). It also suggests that dyadic uncertainty management may serve as a protective tool or type of "reserve capacity," in which interpersonal resources can help people, particularly the low-income, manage stressful environments (Gallo & Matthews, 2003).

Going forward, UMT should consider how significant others can jointly negotiate ambiguity and specifically examine which types of uncertainties and demographics (e.g., participant personality, socioeconomic status) are more likely to result in dyadic uncertainty management. Further, a new principle should be added to UMT that addresses the potential role that dyads can play as co-owners of uncertainty management. Such an addition to the theory would shift the focus of uncertainty management largely from an individual context to a dyadic realm, providing a more holistic view of the process through which ambiguity is (not) negotiated.

Importance of Considering Cultural Influences

This study's findings also highlight the need to consider distal factors within the study of uncertainty management, specifically cultural influences. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain, "There is no doubt that both culture and social structure markedly affect and shape our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors…" (p. 232). Indeed, social norms, values, and cultural contexts influence people's emotions, how they define threats, and how they respond to stress (e.g., Landau, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Money and finances play a powerful role in American culture (Wuthnow, 1996), and the current investigation suggests that culture influenced not just the types of uncertainty faced by participants but the ways in which they were (un) able to manage it, particularly with respect to the money taboo, Protestant Work Ethic/American Dream, and the tension between saving and spending.

Participants' communication uncertainty (ambiguity about talking about finances with their romantic partners) likely stems from society's money taboo (e.g., Trachtman, 1999), in which people are socialized from an early age that talking about money is not culturally acceptable. Parents are even reluctant to talk about money with their children (e.g., Romo, 2011), despite the fact that in the U.S., formal financial education is limited (e.g., Mandell, 2008). Because most people do not grow up learning about money, it is not surprising that they would be unsure how to communicate about money with their romantic partner, particularly when money is commonly reported to be a significant source of arguments, even a precursor to divorce (e.g., Amato & Rogers, 1997; Papp et al., 2009). Indeed, both a lack of financial socialization and communication barriers emerged as obstacles to uncertainty management in the current investigation.

Additionally, such cultural influences as the Protestant Work Ethic and the American Dream seemed to shape participants' uncertainty management efforts. The Protestant Work Ethic and American Dream suggest that if people work hard enough, they should be financially successful—able to afford wants in addition to needs. Even though research indicates that income only increases happiness to the point of meeting people's basic necessities (cf. Ahuvia, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), these values are still highly prized in America. Although all participants at the time of the study experienced some type(s) of financial uncertainty, people who seemed to more highly value material items or who compared themselves to others appeared to more negatively appraise uncertainty, potentially because they viewed their financial hardship as a reflection of their self-worth and identity. As financial achievement is often connected with one's value (Schor, 1998), especially for men (Prince, 1993), these cultural beliefs could imply that people who are unable to afford material items are financial failures, particularly if their neighbors are able to afford greater consumer goods.

It is also likely that participants' personal uncertainty, particularly pertaining to the tension between spending and saving, was influenced by the culture in which the data were collected (the post-recession era) and by the broader American struggle between living for today and saving for a rainy day. Even though the recession (second only to the Great Depression in its severity; Gould-Werth & Burgard, 2012) had officially ended prior to data collection, high unemployment, lower wages and benefits (Mishel & Shierholz, 2011), perceived job insecurity, housing instability (Gould-Werth & Burgard, 2012), and high student loan, mortgage, credit card, and medical debt (Chiteji &

Danziger, 2011) persisted nationally. Conditions were particularly unstable in the participants' geographical region of the Midwest and in their small rural community, which had struggled for years prior to the economic downturn.

Several participants who, despite their economically-distressed surroundings, had personally not suffered much economic adversity prior to the downturn were suddenly confronted with difficult decisions and ambiguity about how to handle their finances. A recent cultural focus on frugality may have made it more acceptable for people to reduce expenditures (Harris, 2009) or provided participants with a way to rationalize cutbacks. In this way, it is possible that a changing U.S. culture made it easier for people to manage this uncertainty by changing behaviors. Yet, at the same time, as the future was unpredictable, other participants felt like they should live in the moment. Their dilemma over whether to spend or save reflected this cultural tension.

The current investigation's findings suggest that UMT should be extended to take into account the powerful role that culture can play in the appraisal and management of uncertainty. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) maintain, "A stressful event does not occur in a vacuum, but in the context of the individual's life cycle and in relation to other events, be they distant, recent, or concurrent" (p. 108). Culture undoubtedly influences the uncertainty management process and merits further attention.

Importance of Examining Individual Factors

As much as culture can influence uncertainty management, personal characteristics also seem likely to shape the ways in which people negotiate ambiguity. Although scholars assert that such factors as people's personality and spirituality can influence how individuals view and manage uncertainty and stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mishel, 1997), these variables have not systematically been examined in the context of UMT. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) write, “In sum, ambiguity is present in one form or another in practically every type of human encounter and ensures that person factors will play an important role in creating individual variations in the appraisal of what is happening” (p. 107). In the current study, several “person factors” seemed to influence uncertainty management strategies and barriers, primarily participants’ financial literacy, age, religiosity, and socioeconomic status. Such individual characteristics are worthy of inclusion by UMT.

Financial literacy emerged as a characteristic that influenced uncertainty management. Participants who, despite America’s money taboo culture, either grew up learning about money or made a concerted effort to become financially savvy as adults, appeared less financially uncertain and more confident about their ability to manage financial uncertainty. Several of these participants stressed the importance of teaching their children about money and made deliberate efforts to talk with them about finances. When these participants encountered uncertain financial times, they reduced uncertainty by seeking information from experts or by relying on their past financial experiences and working to ensure that they and their partner were in agreement about finances. Oftentimes, people with financial acumen were in romantic relationships with people who were not as financially astute; however, as long as the less-financially literate were equally invested in achieving financial goals and were working together with their partner to determine each other’s roles and manage uncertainty, financial and relational outcomes seemed to benefit. When participants lacked financial education and/or were unable to successfully communicate with their partner about financial management (or their partner resisted their uncertainty management efforts, e.g., due to sociocultural barriers), uncertainty management and/or the partnership suffered.

Participants' age was another individual characteristic that likely influenced uncertainty management. Many older couples, regardless of financial status, did not seem to harbor as much financial uncertainty as younger couples. Older individuals who had been married for a greater length of time said they had long implemented plans and strategies and, despite the tumultuous economy, finances were no longer as much of a source of uncertainty, particularly since they were no longer raising children (several participants mentioned how much more financial freedom they had after their children left home). Even older couples who were lower income or lower-middle class talked about the fact that they had learned how to manage their finances and their relationships, sometimes after years of struggle. It may have taken years to come to agree on financial and life priorities and feel comfortable talking about money, but with time and experience, and through communal coping, several older participants had learned to manage financial uncertainty.

Additionally, in the current study, participants' religiosity played a strong role in influencing their uncertainty management. Spiritual participants (many of whom were also lower income) managed uncertainty by "giving [finances] to God," and coming to terms with financial ambiguity as a means of adaptation (this strategy was similarly used by people whose spirituality helped them accept the uncertainty inherent in chronic illness; e.g., Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty et al., 2004). Through adaptation, and by relinquishing control to a higher power, participants viewed uncertainty not as a negative but as an indelible part of life.

Interestingly, research consistently finds that lower perceived control (reported more by lower-income individuals) is linked to lower health outcomes and decreased life satisfaction (e.g., Lachman & Weaver, 1998), leading researchers to conclude that higher levels of control and personal mastery are beneficial. In fact, low-income people with higher control levels experience similar positive outcomes as higher-income people (Lachman & Weaver, 1998). Additionally, Price, Choi, and Vinokur (2002) found that financial strain and loss of personal control lead to depression and impaired role and emotional functioning following job loss.

Despite the importance of personal control, in the current study, surrendering control to God seemed to help participants manage their financial uncertainty and benefit their well-being, consistent with the finding that people's world views, often shaped by religious beliefs, can help individuals make meaning and become resilient (Landau, 2007). Perhaps a belief that their financial success was in God's hands made people feel better about their economic situation, reducing stress and related relational conflict. If people were not completely responsible for their financial status, they could not be blamed for an inability to get ahead or a failure to achieve the American Dream. In addition, relying on religion enabled participants to focus on daily tasks, making the unpredictably involved with big-picture planning more manageable and giving individuals a small sense of power over chronic uncertainty. It is also plausible that because surrendering macro-level control to a higher power was a deliberate choice, participants were able to retain efficacy and avoid becoming adversely affected by negative outcomes that can come from lower levels of control. As Poduska (1992) writes:

> Life offers few guarantees; therefore, security is most likely to be found in the knowledge that one will never be totally secure. To cope effectively with the unexpected, it is more advantageous to develop greater self-confidence and flexibility to deal with what *does* happen in life rather than focusing on attempts at controlling what *might* happen in life (p. 763)

By adapting to chronic uncertainty, participants in the current study were able to focus on the present day and avoid trying to control (and worry about) the future.

Relatedly, future UMT-framed studies should take into account the socioeconomic status of individuals who are facing and managing uncertainty. Higher-income participants, particularly those who were financially literate and economically secure, did not face as many types of uncertainty and seemed generally confident in their abilities to manage ambiguity through communication (either by relying on information or communicatively coordinating efforts with their partners). These participants had typically already established financial systems and rules and believed that they could always fall back on their previous successes in managing finances if necessary. Middle-class and lower-middle class participants experienced the most uncertainty, in part due to such uncertainty management barriers as a lack of financial literacy or difficulties talking about money with their partner. While several participants were able to rely on communal coping or adaptation to manage uncertainty, in some cases participants were extremely uncertain about how they would manage if they were to come on even more challenging times, particularly given the state of the national and local economy. Some participants were so overwhelmed that they preferred financial uncertainty to a negative certainty (such as learning how much their home value had declined).

The current investigation suggests that UMT should include a principle that examines the extent to which the aforementioned individual factors, such as financial literacy, age, religiosity, and socioeconomic status can influence uncertainty management. In addition to taking into account these individual characteristics, the theory should be extended to consider the role that dyads and culture can also play in shaping people's identification, appraisal, and management of financial uncertainty, as well as the barriers that prevent people from negotiating ambiguity. The examination of these proximal and distal variables would make the theory more nuanced and shed greater light into what shapes people's uncertainty management. In this way, the theory would become more sophisticated in its application and lend critical insight into the uncertainty management process, enabling researchers to potentially predict the strategies people might use to manage uncertainty.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

In addition to possible theory extensions, the current study offers several practical applications, uncovering real-world communication strategies people can use to manage uncertainty, as well as underscoring the importance of financial socialization and a need to reconceptualize traditional financial management.

Communication as an Uncertainty Management Tool

This study reinforced UMT's core tenet that communication plays an important role in negotiating uncertainty (Brashers, 2006), as communication spanned nearly all uncertainty management approaches. It was through communication that participants were able to create and implement financial plans and management strategies, establish purchasing rules, seek financial information, and change joint behaviors. Indeed, it was not until Donna, 63, and her husband learned how to effectively talk about money that they were able to reduce uncertainty, accomplish their financial goals, and improve their relational functioning. Not surprisingly, the extent to which participants discussed money largely varied depending on their financial uncertainty. As several participants explained, when times were good, there was less of a need to talk about money because "things are working." Other participants said their financial-related communication fluctuated depending on their economic well-being; when finances were tight, they talked about money more, and the converse was also true. On the other hand, couples who were less financially stable and more uncertain about their financial stability talked about finances quite frequently out of necessity (e.g., they needed to know how much money was left in the account). Conversely, participants reported a lack of communication skills as an obstacle to uncertainty management, further underscoring the importance of communication in negotiating ambiguity. Participants who lacked communication skills (experiencing communication uncertainty regarding how to talk with their partner about money) found themselves at a distinct disadvantage in managing uncertainty. As Lee, 36, acknowledged, his and his wife's inability to discuss finances left them unsure how to make financial decisions and best manage their finances. If he and his wife were able to better communicate, they likely would feel less uncertain about their financial well-being.

Communication Strategies

Not only did this study confirm that communication was a critical component of uncertainty management, but the investigation illuminated practical strategies people can use to discuss finances in order to manage their uncertainty. Talking about money with one's partner can be difficult considering the taboo surrounding money in the U.S. (Romo, 2011; Trachtman, 1999; Treas, 1993) and research indicating that arguments about money can result in a host of negative relational outcomes (e.g., Amato & Rogers, 1997; Dew, 2009; Kerkmann et al., 2000). However, participants in the current study who had learned to communicate about finances with their partners predominately reported financial and personal benefits from having these conversations. These benefits transcended socioeconomic levels. Consistent with previous literature on low-income families (e.g., Orthner et al., 2004), strong communication helped participants struggling with economic hardship manage uncertainty. Even when participants did experience money-related conflict, outcomes were not automatically negative. As participants increased their knowledge of effective ways to resolve arguments and were able to implement financial and communication uncertainty management strategies, participants appeared better able to negotiate their finances and their relationships.

The strategic ways in which partners approached financial communication—postponing conversations when they were beginning to get heated or were at an impasse; picking battles (letting relatively unimportant matters go and focusing on really significant items); and tailoring communication (e.g., talking about communication in an environment and at a time conducive for constructive conversation) are practical takeaways that should help many couples more effectively talk about money and manage their financial uncertainty. Indeed, the findings of this study parallel much of the mainstream financial advice (e.g., discuss finances early on in a relationship, designate a specific time to talk about money, take a break if conversations get heated; Leininger, 2011; Lieber, 2009), providing empirical insight into effective real-world financial communication.

Additionally, a lack of communication (via topic avoidance or concealment—strategies used by participants to reduce conflict or accomplish financial goals) also emerged as salient. The current study found, consistent with the premise of UMT (Brashers, 2001), that when participants wanted to maintain their current state of uncertainty, they avoided or concealed information. Additionally, in some cases, participants concealed information in order to reduce their uncertainty and better their family's economic position. For example, some participants modified individual behavior so as not to reveal the actual amount of savings to their partner in order to reduce uncertainty that their partner would overspend and hinder the family's financial well-being. In this way, avoidance and non-disclosure emerged as useful tools. Despite the negative connotation of concealing financial information from one's partner, so-called “financial infidelity” (e.g., Goudreau, 2011), the current study confirms the notion that openness is not always universally valued and that disclosure can have both positive and negative outcomes (Petronio, 2002). In this way, there can be a “dark side” to concealment, underscoring the notion that all social processes can be both positive and negative (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994).

Interestingly, although communication (or lack thereof) emerged as an important means of managing uncertainty in the current investigation, no participants desired more communication in order to increase their uncertainty. In fact, while research examining uncertainty in health and relational contexts has found that when people appraise uncertainty positively they want to increase it, in part through information seeking, this was not the case in the current study. No participants managed uncertainty by deliberately increasing their uncertainty. This finding suggests that uncertainty within a financial realm may be more typically appraised as aversive compared to within health contexts, in which uncertainty can bring hope about an illness (e.g., Brashers et al., 2000) or in relationships, in which uncertainty can be interpreted as exciting (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Although some participants maintained uncertainty because they preferred this state to a depressing and stressful certainty, individuals did not desire more financial unpredictability or complexity in their lives. Instead of providing participants with optimism, greater financial ambiguity provided them with increased stress and anxiety. People did not react positively to a lack of confidence about money or inability to make sense of finances.

Value of Parent-Child Financial Socialization

The present investigation further highlights the importance of financial socialization, both as a means of helping participants reduce uncertainty and as a process by which participants can teach their children about money and end the generational cycle of financial illiteracy that pervaded several participants' experiences. Indeed, the study's finding that financial socialization can be a source of experiential-information seeking emerged as a novel element of information seeking that was uncovered in the current study. Several participants attributed their ability to determine how to make decisions about money and cope with financial uncertainty to the fact that their parents taught them about money as children. Participants were able to rely on the knowledge that was passed on to them as children to reduce their adult uncertainty; in fact, many of these participants served as their household's primary financial managers. While research indicates that parents are unsure about the extent to which they should talk about finances with their children (e.g., Danes, 1994; Romo, 2011) and that finances can be a taboo topics in families (e.g., Romo, 2011; Trachtman, 1999; Treas, 1993), this study underscores the importance of providing children with financial information to prepare them for future financial management.

Participants in the current investigation reinforced prior research that talking with children about money and modeling financial behavior can make children more aware of and responsible with money (Marshall & Magruder, 1960; Pinto et al., 2005) and influence children's future financial behavior (Webley & Nyhus, 2006). In this context of this study, more financial information helped reduce future uncertainty. Conversely, participants who reported little or no financial knowledge from their family acknowledged that they were at a marked disadvantage, particularly if both they and their partner lacked financial acumen. In fact, inadequate knowledge of money matters as well as poor communication skills emerged as significant barriers to financial uncertainty management. As financial literacy is rarely taught in the classroom (Mandell, 2008), parents are responsible for teaching their children about money (e.g., Clarke et al., 2005;

Godsted & McCormick, 2007). However, many U.S. parents (including some of the participants' parents) lack sufficient knowledge to teach their children (Godsted & McCormick, 2007) and are unable to adequately socialize them about finances.

Consistent with literature that finds that parent-child financial communication is positively associated with children's future financial management (Cho, et al., 2012), participants in the current study who did not grow up learning about finances generally reported making un- or ill-informed financial decisions and feeling unprepared and unknowledgeable about money matters (the converse was also true). As Amy, 34, said, she and her husband "didn't know what we didn't know" about money. Similarly, Lee, 36, spoke of the taboo surrounding finances in his family. Because his parents never talked with him about money and he never observed them communicating about finances with one another, he did not grow up equipped with the skills to talk about such matters with his wife. Conversely, participants who reported receiving direct (deliberate communication) or indirect (modeling of behaviors) socialization from their parents (e.g., Fuerza, 63) expressed more confidence in their own ability to make financial decisions and thus manage their financial uncertainty.

Previous research has uncovered sex differences with respect to financial knowledge and behavior. For example, compared to men, studies have found that women are less confident in financial decision making (Powell & Ansic, 1997; Stinerock et al., 1991), less knowledgeable about investing (Chen & Volk, 1998; Volpe et al., 1996), and more conservative in their financial management (Furnham, 1984). However, these results were not confirmed by the current study. While some females (based on their own or their partner's reports) were reluctant to handle investments, preferring to manage daily bills and budgets, at the same time, some men (based on their own or their partner's reports) were just as unwilling to involve themselves in finances (with respect to day-today management and/or investing), happily deferring financial management to their partner. The present investigation revealed that the largest determining factor as to whether participants of either sex felt comfortable handling money involved their prior financial education and exposure to money.

These findings underscore the importance of parent communication in helping children grow up to become financially stable. Participants in the current study who reported receiving financial communication from their parents said they felt financially prepared and were often their family's primary financial managers. Participants who received a dearth of financial socialization realized they were at a disadvantage and wanted to ensure that their children were not similarly handicapped as adults. In fact, participants such as Lee and Amy were hoping to learn more about money so that they could equip their children with the financial acumen they never had.

The desire of participants who received limited or no financial acumen to teach their children about money aligns with previous research that people who are unhappy with their parents' level of financial disclosure are more open with their own children (Romo, 2011). Additionally, consistent with the current study, two of the reasons parents have acknowledged disclosing financial information to their children is to prevent them from repeating their financial missteps and because they view this information as important for children to know for the future (Romo, 2011). Although several parents in this investigation perceived their uncertainty management had been stymied by a lack of financial socialization, they intended to provide their children with more opportunities because they perceived this information as more beneficial than harmful to their children.

Reconceptualizing Traditional Financial Management

The current study also found that society's traditional financial rules (pay bills in full each month, have a budget, save for the future, avoid going into debt) were regularly broken by some participants and may not be universally beneficial with respect to uncertainty management. Consistent with the process by which low-income participants managed uncertainty through adaptation, one way in which participants were able to negotiate financial ambiguity was by allowing themselves to pay bills late or pay a portion of a bill at a time. Relatedly, a few participants said they did not operate from a budget because budgeting caused them anxiety, suggesting that budgets are not always effective for everyone. Instead of helping people reduce uncertainty, which they generally desired, in some cases, budgeting could potentially increase ambiguity, elevating participants' distress. Additionally, some participants accepted not having any savings because they believed saving was either unrealistic or would preclude them from enjoying life, particularly if they grew up low-income and yearned for the occasional "want" purchase. April, 36, who learned to "give [finances] to God" following her baptism, drained her savings accounts, which she acknowledged violated cultural norms, so that she could afford to stay at home with her children. Despite the loss of a safety net, she gained freedom from financial anxiety and was able to come to terms with uncertainty.

Such experiences indicate that the conventional notions of spending and saving money may not apply or be realistic for everyone and shed light as to why people, particularly low-income individuals, do not always engage in mainstream financial practices. Particularly in the wake of an economic downturn, individuals may question the value in saving when they view banks and the financial market as unstable. It is unclear whether someone in April's circumstances should be persuaded to change her financial management approach, or if the reduced stress and uncertainty she now felt was preferable to following traditional financial acumen and experiencing anxiety. Examining the ways in which low-income participants in particular navigate uncertainty provides useful and much-needed insight into how people who struggle with money make ends meet and can come to terms with their financial status.

The fact that the chronically uncertain rely on a higher power, learn to juggle bills, and place a higher value on friends and family than material goods begs the question as to whether adaptation, while an effective strategy at helping participants cope with ongoing ambiguity, should be encouraged or whether it holds participants back financially because they are not managing finances in the traditional way. Brashers (2006) states that UMT scholars should examine whether "we should teach people that reducing uncertainty is the best route to decision making" (p. 235). The current study suggests that reducing uncertainty is not always the most effective strategy for people to negotiate financial ambiguity. Indeed, mainstream financial recommendations should be retooled to reflect the circumstances of people of all socioeconomic statues versus providing people with generic advice that, in an effort to reduce people's uncertainty, could very well increase their anxiety.

LIMITATIONS

The present study is not without limitations. First, it is important to note that, due to its qualitative nature, the results are not generalizable. However, as Conger and Elder (1994b) note with respect to their interviews of economically-struggling Midwestern families in the 1980s, the findings have "important implications for contemporary and future families who must be increasingly capable of adapting to a volatile and uncertain financial environment" (p. 256). Although only 40 individuals in one small community were interviewed, it is likely that at least some of the sources of uncertainty experienced by these participants are shared by other Americans who, as members of the broader U.S. culture, also must negotiate financial uncertainty as part of daily life.

An additional drawback to the current sample is that it solely examined participants who were in a serious and established romantic relationship. While the study provides an understanding of how couples who are in committed partnerships can manage uncertainty (e.g., in other words, what has worked for couples still together), it does not capture the experiences of couples in failed marriages or partnerships. This insight would be just as valuable. Another limitation is that this study relied on second-hand self-reports from one partner in a romantic relationship. Ideally, both partners would have been interviewed or observed engaging in naturally-occurring conversations, to provide a more complete picture of individual and dyadic financial uncertainty management from both partners' perspectives instead of relying on one participant's reports. For example, while participants reported numerous benefits they perceived from communal coping, their partners may have had a different impression of dyadic uncertainty management. Future research should enlist a dyadic approach. Additionally, inherent in self-reports is retrospective sense making (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), itself a barrier because of the technique's reliance on participants' memory, which may not accurately recall and capture their experiences. However, self-reports, even from one versus both members of a couple, are still meaningful data (see Baxter, 2011), particularly concerning such a sensitive, understudied, and significant topic.

Another limitation is that the participants were self-selected, meaning they chose to partake in the study (Collier, 1995) and may have felt more comfortable talking about money or possessed better financial management and communication practices than the general population. At the same time, because these participants were interested in talking about finances, they may have been more articulate than non-participants, providing a richer glimpse into financial communication. Social desirability and interviewer effects were another potential limitation (e.g., Babbie, 2007), as it is possible that due to the taboo nature of finances, the participants presented themselves in a positive light and/or told the interviewer what they thought she wanted to hear. Also, despite the promise of confidentiality, in light of the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that participants were questioned about their relationship and personal interaction with their romantic partner, some participants may have withheld details of their experiences. However, a few participants explicitly requested that the interviewer not share their responses with their partner and confirmed that the audio-recording was going to be destroyed following transcription and that a pseudonym would be assigned to their transcript, suggesting that participants were relatively forthcoming in their responses.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several areas of future research exist. First, in addition to employing a dyadic perspective and soliciting the accounts of both participants, subsequent research could specifically measure the effect of financial uncertainty on people's relational satisfaction and stability through quantitative measures. While many participants discussed ways in which managing financial uncertainty helped to reduce conflict, this was not specifically examined in the current study. It would be valuable to capture a sense of the role that uncertainty can play in influencing not just financial outcomes but relationships. As Bradbury et al. (2001) write, "Some of the variability in marital distress might be the result of couples not having enough resources of whatever kind—personal, interpersonal, financial—to manage or improve the environment in which they find themselves" (p. 76). In other words, people unable to manage financial uncertainty may report higher conflict and lower relational satisfaction. Part of the money-related conflict reported in the literature (e.g., Erbert, 2000; Papp et al., 2009; Stanley et al., 2002; Zietlow & Sillars, 1988) may actually be due to uncertainty management barriers. This information would be valuable to ascertain in order to assist couples in effectively negotiating conflict and managing their finances.

Additionally, consistent with prior research (Knobloch, 2008), participants in the current study with lower financial uncertainty also seemed to trust one another more, although it is unclear whether people trusted each other more because of lower financial uncertainty or if uncertainty was lower because couples trusted one another. The effect of financial uncertainty on trust should also be examined. Further, such variables as the financial roles that partners maintain in their relationships and the amount of power they perceive they have or want related to financial management could influence uncertainty management and relational satisfaction, and should be tested as well. Also, it could be useful to quantitatively examine the extent to which the uncertainty management strategies that emerged in the current study can mediate family economic stress (Conger & Elder, 1994a).

Further, Mishel (1997) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) maintain that personal characteristics (such as personality, education, and spirituality) can influence the ways in which people respond to uncertainty, and the current study's findings lend support to this notion. Thus, such individual-level factors should be quantitatively examined with respect to their role in UMT. For example, similar to research that spirituality helps people manage uncertainty in chronic illness through adaptation (Crigger, 1996; Landis, 1996; McNulty et al., 2004), April, 36, said that her pre-baptized personality (which she described as having to be in complete control of finances and unwilling to pay bills late) magnified her uncertainty, but that her belief in God helped her to let go and adapt to chronic uncertainty. The extent to which people's individual characteristics are correlated with their perception and management of uncertainty should be examined.

Additionally, future UMT-framed research could explicitly explore the role of the dyad in managing uncertainty. The current study and previous research indicate that family members can co-own and co-manage stressors (e.g., Afifi et al., 2006). Co-ownership and accompanying joint strategies could be specifically tested with respect to the uncertainty management realm (Goldsmith, 2009). For example, when and why is dyadic uncertainty management (not) preferable to individual negotiation of ambiguity? Ideally, both partners' perceptions would be solicited to better understand the nuances of uncertainty management strategies.

Subsequent research could also apply this study's findings to the more global issue of financial illiteracy. A lack of financial knowledge has emerged as a significant social problem, not just for some of the participants in the current study, but for many Americans in general (Cunningham, 2012; Elliott, 2012; Godsted & McCormick, 2007). Because a shortage of financial information impeded several participants' uncertainty management efforts, future research could translate this investigation's interpersonal communication findings to a public communication realm. Current tumultuous economic times and this study's results particularly underscore the need to assist people with ways in which they can best manage uncertainty pertaining to finances and money. Attention should be directed to minimizing and eradicating barriers to financial uncertainty management via a deliberate, empirically-based financial literacy communication campaign.

Existing web-based efforts to arm people with money management skills and such financial fundamentals as how to balance a checkbook and buy a home (e.g., mymoney.gov and smartaboutmoney.org) should be adapted and expanded and print, radio, and TV media (e.g., billboards on highways and buses, public-service announcements aired on radio and/or television) should be employed to reach a larger, more socio-economically diverse audience. It is important to acknowledge, in the development of campaign materials, the finding that financial information can actually increase people's uncertainty, and that traditional advice, such as establishing a budget, may not apply to everyone. As Brashers (2006) asserts:

> We need to understand that people may be distressed by information, which may lead them to avoid situations in which they will encounter it. When we decide that people do need potentially distressing information, we should develop strategies for providing it in ways that minimize anxiety and maximize processing ability (pp. 235-36).

The challenge in developing public service materials involves providing people with the tools in which they can manage uncertainty without increasing their financial anxiety. Part of the campaign should acknowledge the reality that financial uncertainty is universal and thus normal and that all Americans are in this together, but at the same time, there is no automatic one-size-fits-all approach to managing financial uncertainty that works for everyone.

In addition, it is important to confront cultural influences that likely shape financial uncertainty management, such as the American taboo that people should not discuss finances, even within their families (Romo, 2011; Trachtman, 1999; Treas, 1993), as well as fears that money conversations could escalate into unwanted and potentially relationship-damaging arguments (e.g., Amato & Rogers, 1997; Dew, 2009; Kerkmann et al., 2000). To counteract these worries and help people negotiate their uncertainty, efforts should be directed to arming people with financial communication skills and encouraging people to manage finances together, as this study confirmed that communication, joint management, and uncertainty management go hand and hand. As communal coping emerged as an effective strategy in managing financial uncertainty, and parent-child socialization continues to play an important role in helping people manage financial uncertainty as adults, the campaign should focus on improving family financial communication skills. Included in the campaign should be practical ways in which people can effectively talk about money with their spouses and children.

Last, another avenue in which to explore couples' communication about finances involves examining this phenomenon through additional theoretical lenses, such as via Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter, 2011); Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM; Petronio, 2002); and a multiple-goals perspective (Caughlin, 2010; Goldsmith, 2004; Goldsmith et al., 2006).

Relational Dialectics, recently revised and commonly referred to as Relational Dialectics 2.0 (RDT 2.0; Baxter, 2011), was designed to capture the contradictions (or discursive struggles) inherent in communication. RDT 2.0 is a particularly salient theory to understand discussions of challenging or taboo topics during times of conflict or change (Baxter, 2011). Forthcoming research could investigate how couples make meaning about finances by elucidating the culturally- and interpersonally-influenced discourses about finances that emerge in participant reports of conversations with their partner about finances and money. In other words, how is couples' financial communication influenced by cultural norms and interpersonal experiences? Through RDT 2.0, such distal factors as culture and proximal factors as individual and relational characteristics could be specifically and richly explored.

Additionally, CPM (Petronio, 2002) could be extended to elucidate the process of revealing and concealing personal financial information within romantic relationships. CPM is premised on the notion that people own their personal information and decide whether and to whom to reveal it based on a variety of rules, including cultural and risk-benefit criteria. Once the information is disclosed, the recipient of the information becomes a co-owner. While CPM has been applied to elucidate parent-child disclosure of financial information (Romo, 2011), the theory could help explain boundary management in adults with respect to the financial topics romantic partners are upfront about and keep off limits from one another and what motivates these (non) disclosures.

Last, a multiple-goals approach (Caughlin, 2010; Goldsmith, 2004; Goldsmith et al., 2006) would be another valuable framework in which to inform the challenges people in romantic relationships face when they are negotiating competing demands related to money. For example, as the current study suggests, some participants had to balance financial solvency with relational harmony. It would be beneficial to specifically isolate the competing tensions faced by romantic partners in order to learn what strategies they use to achieve their relational, instrumental, and identity goals.

CONCLUSION

Through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews of 40 diverse participants in married or cohabiting relationships, this study provided a unique understanding of the types of acute and chronic financial uncertainty people face and the ways in which they are (un) able to manage uncertainty, underscoring the valuable role communication plays in uncertainty management. This investigation strongly suggests that financial uncertainty management can be conceptualized as a joint enterprise. Indeed, people must be equipped with the skills and confidence to discuss finances with one another in order to manage uncertainty and minimize financial distress. Just as people seek out information via computer-mediated communication (e.g., the internet), mass media (e.g., magazines), and external interpersonal sources (e.g., financial advisors), people can collectively negotiate their uncertainty with their romantic partner. This study's results suggest that UMT should specifically consider the potential role of the significant other in dyadically managing uncertainty. Additionally, this investigation emphasizes the importance of considering the ways in which culture and individual characteristics can shape the negotiation of financial uncertainty, offering a possible extension of the theory.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is your relational status?
2. How long have you been together?
3. How many children do you have?
4. What is you and your spouse's employment situation? [if they are working, what do they do?]
5. Who is the primary breadwinner?
6. How would you describe the ways you and your spouse handle money?
7. What financial roles do you and your spouse take on (e.g. who pays the bills, balances the checkbook; do you have separate accounts; how do you feel about that arrangement; how did it become that way? Has it always been that way?)
8. Do you have a budget? Who handles that and why?
9. What is your view on separate vs. join checking accounts?
10. What are your and your spouse's views about & attitudes towards money (with respect to spending, saving); how are they similar or different?
11. How do you feel about your spouse's attitudes?
12. How would you describe your family's financial status? How long have you been this way?
13. What things about money and finances do you and your spouse talk about? (e.g., debt, bills/medical, education, buying things, mortgage, presents for kids, travel)
14. Why?
15. What triggers these conversations?

16. What is the tone of the conversations?
17. What, if any, financial topics do you deliberately avoid talking about with your spouse?
18. Why?
19. What, if any, financial topics do you think your spouse deliberately avoids talking about or bringing up with you? Why?
20. What kinds of financial and money issues do you wish you and your spouse talked about but you don't?
21. Why?
22. What things about money and finances do you wish you didn't talk about?
23. Why?
24. What are the conversations about money that are the biggest sources of conflict?
25. Why?
26. What has been the toughest/most memorable conversation you and your spouse have had about money?
27. What things about money/finances worry you?
28. Why? [This item was amended during data collection to also ask participants if they have discussed these worries with their spouse and if so, why]
29. What kind of economic background did you grow up in? How did your parents talk to you about finances growing up? How has that influenced your attitude about money (how you talk with your kids)?
30. Have you noticed that your money conversations have changed with the economy, or when you may have experienced financial struggles?

31. How have you and your spouse changed your financial habits with the economic downturn?
32. For many people, talking about money is a taboo topic and money causes conflict in a lot of relationships. Why do you think that is? Advice for avoiding/reducing money-related conflict?
33. What else would you like to add?

Thank you so much for your help! Who else could I talk to? One last thing, do you mind filling out these quick surveys? Two ask about your relationship and one asks basic demographic questions (below). Feel free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

What is your age as of the time of this interview?

________ Years

What race or ethnicity do you most identify with? Check the best answer.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Caucasian/White
- Other

What best describes your highest educational level? Check the best answer.

- Completed some high school
- High school graduate
- Post-high school vocational training
- Completed some college
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Completed some postgraduate work
- Masters degree (including MBA)
- Doctorate degree (including JD)
- None of the above

Are you employed outside the home? Check the best answer.

- Part time
- Full time
- Not currently employed
- Retired

Do you own your home? _________ Yes _________ No

What is your primary occupation? Check the best answer. If your occupation is not listed, select none of the above.

- Executive/upper management
- Doctor/surgeon
- Educator
- Other professional (e.g., lawyer, architect, engineer)
- General management (e.g., vice president, director)
- Middle management (e.g., junior manager, department or branch head)
- Small business owner
- Other non-manual employee
- Manual worker
- Homemaker
- Student
- None of the above

What is your (NOT INCLUDING YOUR SPOUSES', if applicable) before-tax income? Check the best answer.

- $0-$24,999
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000-$149,999
- $150,000-$199,999
- $200,000-$249,000
- $250,000 and up

Approximately how much savings (e.g., retirement investments, college fund, rainy day money) does your household have?

- $0-$4,999
- $5,000-$9,999
- $10,000-$24,999
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000 and up

Approximately how much debt (e.g., student loans, car loan, credit card, medical, NOT MORTGAGE) does your household have?

- $0-$4,999
- $5,000-$9,999
- $10,000-$24,999
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000 and up

How many kids do you have? ____

What is the sex AND age of each kid(s)? ________________________________

What is your spouse's age as of the date of this interview?

________________ Years

What race or ethnicity does your spouse most identify with? Check the best answer.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Caucasian/White
- Other

What best describes your spouse's highest educational level? Check the best answer.

- ○ Completed some high school
- ○ High school graduate
- ○ Post-high school vocational training
- ○ Completed some college
- ○ Associates degree
- ○ Bachelors degree
- ○ Completed some postgraduate work
- ○ Masters degree (including MBA)
- ○ Doctorate degree (including JD)
- ○ None of the above

Is he or she employed outside the home? Check the best answer.

- ○ Part time
- ○ Full time
- ○ Not currently employed
- ○ Retired

What is his or her primary occupation? Check the best answer. If the occupation is not listed, select none of the above.

- Executive and upper management
- Doctor/surgeon
- Educator
- Other professional (e.g., lawyer, architect, engineer)
- General management (e.g., vice president, director)
- Middle management (e.g., junior manager, department or branch head)
- Small business owner
- Other non-manual employee
- Manual worker
- Homemaker
- Student
- None of the above

What is his or her before-tax income? Check the best answer.

- $0-$24,999
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000-$149,000
- $150,000-$199,999
- $200,000-$249,000
- $250,000 and up

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Study Title: How Couples Talk about Money & Finances

Introduction: You are invited to be in a research study concerning how couples talk about money and finances. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by Lynsey Kluever Romo, visiting instructor of Communication Studies, as well as student researchers X and X.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore how couples talk about money and finances with each other.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in a face-to-face interview. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded for later analysis. Finally, we will ask you for some basic demographic information, such as sex, age, marital status, and length of your relationship, as well as to fill out two short surveys about your relationship in general.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: There are no known physical or psychological risks associated with participating in this study. In addition to helping us explore an under-researched topic, you will also receive a $10 gift card to [X Grocery Store].

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Your record for the study may, however, be reviewed by any member of the research team or the IRB; to that extent, confidentiality is not absolute.

Compensation: You will receive a $10 [X Grocery Store] gift card for your time.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with X College. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time for any reason without affecting those relationships and without penalty (you will still receive the gift card).

Contacts and Questions: Please feel free to contact the primary researcher of this study, Lynsey Romo, at lromo@.X.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about the way you were treated as a participant in this research study, please contact IRB@X.edu. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: When you sign this form, you agree that you understand the above description of this research. You also agree that your questions have been answered, and that you want to take part in this research study.

____ ________________________

Signature of Participant Date

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval

X College IRB Approval

From: X
Date: Wed, Mar 2, 2011 at 12:37 PM
Subject: IRB Approval F11-03
To: Lynsey Romo <lromo@X.edu
Cc: X

Dear Lynsey,

I am pleased to inform you that your IRB proposal titled "How Couples Talk about Money & Finances" (F11-03) has been approved. You may now begin your data collection, a process that should be completed by 5/11/11. If you need to collect data after this date, please contact me and I will help you extend that deadline.

Best wishes for success in your research!

Sincerely yours,

X College IRB Chair

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